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BEECHCROFT

# COMRADE JOHN

BY

MERWIN-WEBSTER

AUTHORS OF "CALUMET 'K,'" "THE SHORT-  
LINE WAR," ETC., ETC.

*Merwin, S.*

*WITH A FRONTISPIECE IN COLOR  
BY GEORGE E. BURR*

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# COMRADE JOHN

## CHAPTER I

### THE FLOWERING OF THE BEEHCROFT SPIRIT

HERMAN STEIN was, at forty-five, a success as the prophet of a new and growing religion. Of his book, "Toil and Triumph," he had sold three hundred and sixty thousand copies; and as he had published it himself, and had disposed of two-thirds of this number through the mails at the list price, the profits were large. His mind was filled with a not unpicturesque mixture of Ruskin, William Morris, Froebel, Whistler, The New Testament, Rossetti, and St. Thomas Aquinas. He had outgrown and put behind him both the dissipations of his youth and his early career as a charlatan and a wanderer on the outer coast of the social order. Just how much of a charlatan he remained, it would be difficult to say. With the tremendous pressure of his success and of the

loyal belief of several hundred thousand followers urging him on to cross the line that separates prophetic leadership from mere grotesquery, it grew steadily more difficult to hold himself in check. But he recognized this difficulty, and he had determined to keep himself resolutely in the background during the expansion of the "Toil and Triumph" movement which he believed must be undertaken at once if the ground he had already gained was not to begin slipping away from him.

The religion he was promoting was constructed with some skill. He had been quick to see that where people were even fifty years ago aroused by miracles, they are to-day attracted by specious reasoning. He knew, too, that a new religion, if it is to compete with the old ones, must offer a spiritual something for nothing. The germ of the "Toil and Triumph" theory was that one may build character and soul, which together make beauty, by working with the hands. The more intrinsically beautiful the object made, the more rapid the attainment. Commercial labor, with a money return in view, was vitiating and degrading. Drudgery, also, was immoral. Work, to be of the slightest value, must be entered into with joy

and lightness of heart, and therefore (though this was not stated) must be easy. The working hours, too, must be short, in order to allow time for meditation and the bliss of solitude. Naturally the simplest way to draw considerable numbers into this sort of thing, and to induce them to put some part of their money and property into his hands, was to establish one or more secluded retreats where they could dwell and toil together, removed from the real cares and work of the world, — and in this, again, Herman Stein was successful. He had been known, on occasion, to supplement the undoubted therapeutic value of his mountain settlement, Beechcroft, with occasional feats of healing for which his real skill as a hypnotist, as well as his dominating personality, singularly fitted him, especially when dealing with women and with the less rugged types of men.

Stein had set about the business of extending his enterprise into a big, international religion, with foresight. It would not do to change its character, or he would lose many of his present disciples. The development must appear to be spontaneous while it must really be laid out as cautiously as a political movement. Two things seemed to him essential. The first was to rebuild

Beechcroft, which was in the mountains of eastern New York State, into the most beautiful place in the world. He knew that he was not competent to plan the work himself, and yet he did not think it would do to employ an architect and contractors; the development of the place must appear to be the flowering of his own genius under the hands of his disciples. Therefore he proposed to find another genius, preferably inhabiting a young and comparatively unknown man with the training of an architect and the practical force of an experienced contractor, who could direct the work in the guise of his personal disciple and overseer.

The second thing was to find a young, beautiful, emotional woman who could be trained and moulded in his own hands into an exponent of his theories, and who could be used to interpret them to the outside world and to win converts.

It was like Herman Stein that when these ideas first came to him he did not know that two such persons existed. It was also like him that he had found them both, or that he was on the point of finding them. The woman he had not yet seen; she was abroad with her aunt; but he had seen five striking, fascinating, bewildering portraits of her at Moberly Pole's exhibition. The

man was in Pittsburg, where he had created and built that extraordinary spectacle, "Through the Looking-Glass," at the great Industrial Exhibition. His name was John Chance.

The two things which have made the modern exposition possible are the electric light and the sort of construction material which is cheap as well as beautiful. These things have also made possible the modern amusement park, with its lagoons, its chutes, its scenic railways, its astonishing illusions, and its quadrangles of grotesque, yet showy, solid-looking buildings. And just as the older day of the strap-railroad, the kerosene light, and the district school, developed the type of showman of which P. T. Barnum was the highest exponent, so the newer day of the trolley car, the electric light, and the ten-cent magazine has developed the type of showman of which John Chance seemed likely to become the highest exponent.

This new sort of showman had studied at the Beaux Arts, and had triumphantly shattered the ancient traditions by applying to architecture the principles of pictorial composition and color. He was a man of education and feeling, was, in short, what the world on this side of the Atlantic

understands to be a gentleman, but was, none the less, in his every fibre, a showman, as completely wrapped up in his ideas for entertaining and thrilling his "public" as is the actor, the painter, the writer, the poet, the musician. Like these, he had his moments of deep feeling, of, one might even say, inspiration. And like many of these he was young; not yet turned thirty, smooth shaven, blue of eye, with a certain easy carelessness of dress, and with an air of unquestioning command in the set of his not overbroad shoulders and in the face which seemed now boyish, now unexpectedly mature. He feared no one; he had nothing to conceal. His ideals were in the lavish and almost unnecessary beauty of his show-creations. He always gave his "public" more than their money demanded. But within these broad limits of honesty and fair dealing he was frankly, good-humoredly commercial.

The only drawback to John Chance, in his relation to Stein's plan, was that his work at Pittsburg, topping that at Atlanta, Omaha, and St. Louis, had already given him a certain reputation. No man could create anything so new, so bizarre, so grotesque, so riotously fanciful, and yet, as a whole, such a triumph of archi-

tectural and aquatic grace and beauty as Chance's five-acre spectacle, "Through the Looking-Glass," and remain in the dark. But still, he was young. And then his fame was mostly confined, so far, to exposition and theatrical circles, and his temporary disappearance from those circles need hardly call for comment. The great thing about him, above and beyond his unquestionably sound architectural training and his astounding fertility of ideas, was that he carried all his work in his head. The accounts agreed on that. He accomplished his results by being on the ground in person sixteen hours a day.

It was with a pretty clear notion of the man in his mind that Stein arranged a meeting in Moberly Pole's studio, on Thirty-first Street. The evening was set after Chance's return to New York with his Pittsburg laurels pasted in his scrap-book.

Oddly enough, Chance came. He had promised himself a long vacation. He had seen all the plays in town. It was February, and consequently no outdoor entertainment was practicable. And as he was sailing for Paris in the morning, — for Paris, the gay, the incon-

sequent, the charming, — he knew of no better amusement for this one evening than a meeting with Herman Stein. He had no plans whatever for the next few months. Sometime within the year he meant to break ground for the astonishingly new sort of an amusement resort with which he proposed to conquer New York City; but the negotiations for the land were not settled yet. Paris was his inspiration. In Paris he absorbed the light-hearted, the fanciful, the glowing sense of exuberant life and light and color and pleasure which the unthinking public was already coming to take for granted in his creations. He would be back, sooner or later; but meanwhile, as he racily put it, it was Paris for his.

He came whizzing into Thirty-first Street in his big touring car, at six o'clock; ordered the chauffeur to return at ten; and placed himself in the hands of the overripe Moberly Pole for dinner at the Portrait Club.

Chance found the painter a bore of a vain and unhealthy type, but partly because he was endowed with patience and humor, partly because the situation piqued his interest, he endured the man. When they had returned to the studio,

and a telephone message had been sent to Stein, Chance whiled away a half hour by strolling about the long room. There was not the slightest doubt that Moberly Pole could paint. And neither was there doubt that the Persian hangings and the bits of tapestry, the really beautiful if cluttered bric-a-brac, the big samovar, the Bengal tiger skin thrown carelessly across the model stand, the nude studies displayed in an artful half light, the quaint furniture, and the three-quarters portrait of Mrs. Eversly Grant, the only object in the room on which a full light was thrown, — neither was there doubt that all this had been contrived to catch the fancy of those ignorantly wealthy persons who do not happen to know that a real studio is usually a workshop.

A copy of "Toil and Triumph" was lying on the table, and Chance picked it up and examined it. The paper, a fairly successful imitation of the thin paper used in the Oxford Bible, was not good in quality; the printing was bad. The cover was of limp calf, turned wrong side out to give the effect of a rough finish, and it was held to the book body only by the end papers. The cost of manufacture could hardly have exceeded thirty or forty cents a volume, but Chance

was willing to allow fifty. It was for a duplicate of this copy that he had, a day earlier, paid four dollars and a half.

The bell rang, and after a moment Chance could hear a heavy step on the stair. Pole opened the door and stepped aside with it; and Chance, who was standing in the shadow directly opposite, had his first view of the author of "Toil and Triumph."

Herman Stein was a large man, not fat, but massive. He looked powerful, physically, and he had a big, commanding way with him which his manner of deliberate simplicity could not cover. His face, like his body, was massive rather than fat, a square face, blocked in with rugged strokes and deep shadows. It was framed, under the broad-brimmed hat, with a mass of darkish hair, which was cut off at the neck in a modified Dutch fashion.

"Mr. Chance is here," said Pole, in the high-pitched, melodious voice, which to most men was repulsive and to some women was exceedingly agreeable, "Mr. Stein — Mr. Chance."

Chance stepped forward and took the large hand in a firm grip. For one flashing instant their eyes met, squarely, unequivocally. The

big man was deep, there was no doubt about it. He not only knew the world; he knew also what he wanted from the world, and how he proposed to get it. And he was inscrutable. If ever he had possessed a sense of humor, as Chance was ready to believe, it had been battened under the hatches years ago and starved to death. As for Chance himself, in spite of his easy courtesy, there was a momentary flicker in his eyes, or perhaps it was about his mouth, which, if it did not suggest a mirthful, almost impish delight in the situation, suggested something very near it. That one quick look, and that uncompromising grip, made it plain that these two rather remarkable men were prepared to understand each other. Pole, who had no personality, merely a gift and a manner, faded tacitly out of the picture, even went off, after placing chairs and cigars at the round teakwood table, and wrote letters in the adjoining room.

Chance lighted a cigar, settled back in his chair, and raised his good-humored eyes to the face of the prophet. The vacation spirit was strong within him. He was ready for any sort of an adventure. The only definite hope he permitted himself was the faint hope that this

might really turn out to be an adventure of one mild sort or another. Meanwhile, in a certain tolerant way, he was ready to think that he liked Stein. If the man was a faker, he was a good one.

Unexpectedly, while Stein was arranging his thoughts and framing his first few sentences, Chance decided to open the conversation himself. He removed his cigar, smiled a boyish smile, and said:—

“I read your book last night.”

Stein had no data for concluding that Chance had set about it to jolt him off his pedestal as a preliminary to getting down to business, but the suspicion sprang up in his mind. And he was right. He looked at the young man out of inscrutable eyes, and replied:—

“I hope you found something in it to interest you, Mr. Chance.”

“A great deal.”

Stein looked at him in silence for a moment. The notion occurred to Chance that he was revolving his ponderous mind in order to bring another side of it to the front. Finally he spoke.

“You have had a rather unusually wide experience for a man of your years, Mr. Chance.”

A slight inclination of the head was his reply.

"Among other things, you are an architect and builder, I understand."

Again Chance inclined his head.

"Are you open to consider a professional engagement?"

"That would depend."

"On what?"

"On a great many things."

Again Stein paused. Then he produced a big manila envelope, and spread out on the table a number of photographs, some plans, and a map which Chance recognized as one of the large-scale sheets published by the National Geographical Survey.

"These photographs," said Stein, "will give you some idea of Beechcroft."

"It seems to be an attractive spot," said Chance, as he looked them over.

"It is very beautiful," Stein replied. "It is a narrow valley, with Mount William rising almost sheer at the head, and a brook descending in a series of cascades. The trees are nearly all beeches. Now, Mr. Chance," — the prophet leaned forward and clasped his large hands on the table, — "I propose to make Beechcroft the most beautiful spot in the world."

Chance looked up, frankly interested.

"More, Mr. Chance, I propose that this beauty shall be recognized everywhere as a flowering of the Beechcroft spirit, beauty through toil. I propose to show convincingly that the most beautiful place in the world may result from the simple, day-by-day work of loving hands, when guided by perfect faith in the beautiful. The means at my disposal are limited, — I will say this frankly, — considering the extent of the work to be done. I should like to use nothing but stone in constructing the buildings, — the only enduring material. But I am afraid that stone is out of the question."

"What is the extent of the work, Mr. Stein?"

"The community buildings must include wood carving, furniture, carpet, lace, and silver working shops, publishing and printing shops, dormitories and assembly rooms, a library, and studios. I mean also to include in the plan an imposing temple, to seat two thousand persons, with a great organ."

"And how much money have you to spend?"

"Any sum," Stein replied, not unimpressively, "up to half a million dollars."

"That certainly does eliminate stone," said Chance.

"What could you suggest?" asked Stein, watching the expression of growing interest on the young man's face.

"Something that looks like stone — and isn't. If you don't mind my telling you precisely what I think, Mr. Stein —"

He waited, and the prophet indicated that he did not mind.

"— this is a showman's problem. As a showman, it interests me. Your Beechcroft must be made an immensely impressive place, and it must be done as cheaply as possible. Well, it can be done." As his interest deepened, his eyes took fire, and his words came faster. Stein had approached him right. The notion of creating the most beautiful place in the world — that was what appealed to John Chance. "You want it so that the first glance will strike in hard, will make a woman, even a man, feel grandly solemn. You, just as much as I, must get results. After your publicity man has brought the people out, you've got to thrill them. You've got to make them gasp with delight. The dividends are in that gasp."

Stein was a little surprised. "I am not sure that you understand," he said, after a moment. "Beechcroft is not a side-show."

"I think I understand, Mr. Stein. I used the word 'gasp' advisedly. Architecture can be made to stir people up, as music does. In my trade, in the side-show trade, if you like, we shake the people up, handle them roughly, and we find that the dividends are in the squeal. That's where the chutes come in, and the scenic railway. It is your plan, with Beechcroft, if I get you, to stir their emotions, to give them what I suppose you might call an 'uplift,' to make them think of sublime things. If you can't produce some such effect, you wouldn't be justified in spending five thousand dollars, let alone half a million."

"Can such an effect be produced, Mr. Chance?"

The young man looked up and nodded. "Architecture is the most backward of the arts," he said; "music has broken loose, literature has broken loose, painting has broken loose. In all of them, big men have overridden the ancient traditions in order to express themselves and their time — our time. But the architects go endlessly on copying the ideas that expressed some other time, but that have nothing whatever to do with ours."

"Can you explain how architecture is to break loose, Mr. Chance?"

Like a good many other big-caliber men, Herman Stein recognized his sort of ideas wherever he found them, and gladly took them for his own. This was certainly his sort of idea, — free, bold, big. Poor Burkett used to have such ideas. Burkett had rewritten "Toil and Triumph," fifteen years earlier, on a salary from Stein, and had added form and finish to Stein's shrewd but badly expressed conceptions. Then Burkett, like so many other of the weak men and women who had contributed to Stein's relentless development, had dropped out. In his case it had been drink, ending in degradation and a drifting back to the outer coast where he and Stein had first met. Then Stein had taken over the care of his wife, and later, on a rumor of his death, had married her. The rumor proved to be misleading; but Burkett had sufficient decency of spirit to stay away until a second and this time a well-grounded rumor to the same effect found its way to Beechcroft.

Stein was looking at Chance, awaiting an answer to his question.

"I could hardly say," replied the younger man, with a slight shrug. "I rather guess that is where the individual enters. I can feel these

things and I can work them out, but it would take some time to put what I feel in words. I will say this much, however. Suppose your temple, which, by the way, ought to express a conception as new architecturally as your religion expresses philosophically, — suppose it were to take the form of a tower, or a cluster of towers, with that upper cascade issuing from its base. Then suppose you were to lead up to it with the other buildings in a half ellipse, backing up against the hills on each side.” He spread out the Geological Survey map, and studied the brown contour lines for a moment.

“Treat the elliptical enclosure and the curving driveway around it conventionally, and paint all the buildings to represent white marble. Now suppose you were driving into the valley for the first time, along the road that swings around the end of this hill, — he indicated the place on the map, — “and the thing burst on you all at once, — the green enclosure with the two rows of snow-white buildings curving around it, leading up to the great white temple, all standing out sharply against the green slope of Mount William, — wouldn’t something like that make you sit up and catch your breath, seen on a clear

day, under a blue-and-white sky? You might add a touch of color, to warm it up, humanize it. Say, red tile roofs all around, and a touch of red about the temple. If red tiles cost too much, you could make it out of staff—excelsior and cement plaster, that is—and paint it. Staff lasts quite a few years.”

The prophet was looking squarely at Chance. Now, without the slightest change of expression, he said, “Will you undertake, Mr. Chance, to make Beechcroft what I want it to be?”

Outwardly Chance was as inscrutable as the prophet, but he was none the less really surprised. Until this moment it had simply not occurred to him to take the situation seriously. Stein was a joke, Beechcroft was a joke, “Toil and Triumph” was a joke. The something very like admiration that Stein inspired in him grew out of the fact that Stein, too, was a showman, and a good one. He, too, knew how to handle crowds, knew how to sway and dominate them. But now, really, if Stein would pay enough, why not make Beechcroft the most beautiful place in the world? He could do it, he knew, in six or eight months. It would solve the problem of keeping his foremen employed. And there

ought to be money in it. If Stein wanted to hire a creative genius, he would have to pay for him.

These things passed through his mind during the smaller part of a minute, while he sat quietly looking across the table. "Yes," he said then, "I'll undertake it."

Stein's interlocked fingers gripped together more tightly. He was now at the critical point in this situation. He had to ask Chance to do a highly unprofessional thing, a thing which no regular architect who was big enough and experienced enough to undertake the work would for an instant consider doing. He knew that Chance was not a regular architect; but he had no means of knowing that the nearest thing to a bitter strain in Chance's character grew out of the fact that most of the regular architects, wrapped in their traditions and their dogmas, scorned John Chance, where they gave him any notice at all, precisely because he was free, and bold, and big. He had no means of knowing that John Chance was a very lonely young man, standing by himself, really the first exemplar of a new sort of profession which was not even that of a regular showman. So he put the question with some inward concern, because if

Chance should refuse him, he did not know, at this moment, where he could turn.

"I have only one condition to make, Mr. Chance. It must be clearly understood that the entire plan is mine. The new Beechcroft is to be a realization of my ideals carried out under the hands of those who accept my principles. If you do this work, you must appear only as one of my followers. You and what few assistants you bring with you, must dress as we dress, and live as we live. It is vitally important that those who see you at Beechcroft shall not know your history or your name. Frankly, if it should get out that I had employed you to do this work, the unthinking public would jump to the conclusion that the whole Beechcroft idea is a fraud. It would ruin me, and those who are dependent on me. The public, as you doubtless are aware, Mr. Chance, is too capricious, too unreasonable, to be taken into our confidence."

Chance's face did not change expression, but his eyes shot one swift look into the massive, shadowy face. During that look his price went up exactly one hundred per cent. Granting Stein's premises, the stipulation was sound enough. Stein's religion was based on the doctrine that

beautiful things were the result of work with the hands — and of faith. If the new Beechcroft should be the result, apparently, of anything but the handiwork of the Beechcrofters, Stein would be stultified. Chance saw all this clearly enough, and had there been no business considerations involved, he would probably have indulged in a good laugh.

“What is the dress?” he asked.

“A modified Grecian tunic and sandals for the summer. In winter, we dress more heavily, of course.”

“Chance’s eyes strayed off to the Japanese hangings, the feminine little writing desk, and Moberly Pole; and that same mirthful, impish flicker which had appeared about his mouth at the beginning of the conversation, reappeared there now. He was trying to imagine Bill Hemenway, his superintendent of construction, in a tunic and sandals.

“All right,” he said. “My price is fifty thousand dollars for a year’s work, or for the job if it takes less than a year.”

Stein swallowed something. “But what if it should take more than a year?” he asked.

“It won’t.”

There was a long silence. Finally the prophet inclined his head very deliberately. "We are agreed, then," he said, and extended his hand.

But Chance had another question. "How am I to be assured, Mr. Stein, that you can pay me this money?"

Stein again revolved that big mind of his. Then he turned to Moberly Pole, who was writing busily. "Have you a messenger call, Mr. Pole?"

The painter shook his head.

"Wait a moment," said Chance, glancing at his watch. He crossed to the window, parted the thin silk curtains, and looked down into Thirty-first Street. The row of old-fashioned brownstone houses opposite, all alike, and all, taken together, like any other row of brownstone houses on any other cross street in that part of town, had about them a wholesome air of permanence which was refreshing after the unhealthy atmosphere of Pole's studio. Except for his motor car, which stood at the curb below, and for a few pedestrians, the street was empty; but over at the corner he could just see the lights and the thinnish stream of vehicles that marked Fifth Avenue. From the other direction came

faintly the clang and rumble of street cars, which he knew meant that Broadway lay there, with its glaring lights, and its restaurants, and its gay, brazen, costly sense of living fast and well. He rather liked Broadway — next to Paris. It was stimulating, if you stopped just short of taking it seriously.

When he turned back into the studio, he saw in it what he had seen when he first entered, a picture that rang hollow with artifice. It did not look quite real, even including Stein and Pole, who were quietly talking together.

"My car is here," he said. "You are welcome to use it for any message you wish to send."

Accordingly, Stein wrote a brief note, and shortly afterward received a reply which he handed to Chance. "It is addressed directly to you, I see."

Chance read it, and for the first time nearly gave expression to his astonishment. The letter was written in longhand, and was signed with a name familiar to every one who knows anything whatever about Wall Street and its corporations. It was an agreement to pay John Chance, in consideration for his work in reconstructing Beechcroft, the sum of fifty thousand dollars,

in four equal quarterly instalments, the first of which would be payable on the first day of March. Chance replaced it in the envelope, and pocketed it.

"That is all right," he said, with a cheerful nod. "I am with you, or I soon shall be. I am going away for a little rest — a few weeks. When I get back, I shall be ready to pitch in. You had better let me take the map and the photographs."

He said good night, ran down the stairs, let himself out, and with a brief — "Hoboken, Claude, — the *Deutschland*," curled up on the broad seat in the enclosed tonneau and went to sleep. He was to have a number of interesting experiences had he known it. He had entered into a new set of relationships, and for a while he was to see more of the long arm of circumstance than he had ever happened to see before. But he did not know it. And in any case he would probably have slept as soundly.

## CHAPTER II

### THE MAN ON THE TABLE

JOHN CHANCE had, on the afternoon of *Mardi Gras*, exactly the best place in Paris for watching the carnival, a table not quite in the front rank before the Café de la Paix. He had a cigar between his fingers and a little asbestos mat over his glass of coffee to keep the confetti out of it.

It was a sparkling, frosty day, and the great living river, the Boulevard, where the police had stopped all wheel traffic hours before, was flowing bank full with a stream of irresponsible, irrepressible, good-humored, childlike humanity. Here was an eddy where a close-packed ring of folk gazed in serious wonder, while two grave and apparently much-embarrassed Englishmen executed a painstaking dance, and a pretty girl in the brass helmet and breeches of the *Garde Républicaine* officiously kept back the crowd. Now and then a pair of grotesque masks would

go by, and once a whole riotous platoon of *pierrots* and *harlequins*.

But these costumes were, after all, exceptional. The spirit of the frolic was spontaneous enough, went far enough below the surface, to be enjoyed in whatever clothes one happened to have on. There was just one rule of conduct in force to-day, to take everything for granted and to keep your temper; and subject to this rule everybody was equally invited to come out and play, regardless of the uniform society had imposed on him. In general, the only modification of one's everyday appearance was that effected by the confetti; the confetti that lay thick upon shoulders and drifted in hat brims, that powdered rich furs and caught in dishevelled hair and wedged itself into the meshes of lace; the confetti that crunched and crept under foot like snow, and that hung in the air a veritable varicolored mist, spouting up in little jets and shimmering down upon the perfectly miscellaneous, perfectly homogeneous crowd.

Paris would have got up this celebration, no doubt, even if John Chance had not arrived the day before, but it was as good a recognition of the beginning of his holiday as if it had been planned for him expressly. He was the very same

man who at Pittsburg a little while ago had been producing one brilliant idea a minute, like a human spark coil, the same man, but animated now by a milder current. He lounged back in his chair, taking little sips of smoke and coffee, and feeling very, very much at home. It surprised him how small a difference a year's absence makes, how many people he knew, among the stream that went crowding past. He saw a few really old friends, men whom, a little later, he would look up and talk out the nights with, but they got nothing from him now but a gay hail and a wave of the hand. He was visiting Paris to-day, and no single one of her inhabitants could get more than a momentary spark of his attention.

But even this indolent sort of enjoyment involved for him some sort of occupation, and the party at the next table provided him with it. There were three of them, a stout, bourgeois young Frenchwoman and two men, apparently her husband and his brother. She was dressed in what was patently her gala attire; her cloak and hat — the latter a large and rather sprawly confection — had evidently felt the restraint of her husband's hold on the purse-strings, but the gown was the unchecked efflorescence of her

own fancy. She threw back the cloak on taking her seat, though the day was sharp enough to suggest her retaining it, and the glory of the gown was revealed. It was a papery satin of that shade known as magenta and it caught John Chance's attention like a shout in his ear. He gazed at it in naïve amusement for a while, then bought two sacks of blue confetti from a passing vender. The effect of an overtone of blue on that shiny purply pink ought to be electrifying. He lazily sprinkled handfuls of it over her, and so successful was the resulting color effect that most of the passing crowd caught the idea and humored it. Those who did not, he gently but gravely remonstrated with, in French or in English, as it happened. She retaliated by shaking her pink confetti into his coffee every time he tried to drink it and, with her two escorts, passed the time of day with him as one does on *Mardi Gras*, and on no other day in the calendar.

The game needed only occasional moments of his attention, but it was during one of these that a man, an American, about his own age, struggled out of the crowd and got near enough to slap him on the shoulder before he was recognized.

"Hello —" he began.

Chance looked up, and saw in the newcomer an old companion of his Beaux Arts days; it was all of three years since they had met, but to-day was carnival. "You haven't any blue confetti, have you?" he said, by way of greeting, and nodded toward the lady in the magenta gown.

The new man looked and smiled, but rather absently. He had something more serious on his mind. "Has she gone by here?" he asked. "Have you seen her?"

Chance laughed, an outright, boyish laugh. "You do take a chap back. Yes, I've seen her. For a rough guess, I've seen about nine thousand of her."

The other man smiled, drew up to Chance's table an opportunely vacated chair, and rather deliberately lighted a cigarette. "You haven't seen her, then," he said quietly. "You'll know it when you do. You and all the rest of you in this café will be standing on your tables. She's just one of those freaks of nature that happen along once a century or so, and can make men do such things. She's dressed in white and — I mean this absolutely literally — she's lambent; like a great cathedral candle, burning. I actually

believe she's luminous. She made me think of the angel of the resurrection."

The man was speaking, between long inhalations of the cigarette, quietly, and out of a varied and abundant experience; it was clear that he meant exactly what he said. Chance looked at him with a glint of real interest, but he answered, smiling, as he had done before.

"What Paradise does she inhabit, this angel? *Folies Bergère*? *Moulin Rouge*?"

"She's an American, and she's out with that little shrimp Hollister. Do you remember him?"

The corners of Chance's eyes screwed down a little. "The last time I saw Tommy Hollister was one rainy evening when he was walking down *Mont-Parnasse*, past the *Dôme*. He wore sandals instead of shoes, and no socks, and I can see his muddy trouser legs now, flapping around his bare ankles. He had that English girl with him — you remember? — and they slopped along in the rain with their arms around each other's necks, and smoked the same cigarette, alternately."

The other man frowned. "I know," he said. "But this girl, — oh, I've no brief for her, — but it's patent that she doesn't belong anywhere in the same world with Tommy Hollister. It's

only some rather grotesque accident that can have thrown them together. She ought to be taken away from him and sent home to her mother. She is to be taken away from him, I understand, but I'm afraid that the sending home to her mother will be postponed — indefinitely. And that will be a pity."

Chance looked at him curiously. "It's not in the least like you, — a man at your time of life, — this taking appearances so seriously. Anyhow, there never was a carnival that somebody hadn't to pay for."

His friend's only reply was to lay a compelling hand on his arm, and with the other point into the crowd. "There she is," he said. "I caught a glimpse of white. Get up on your table so that you can see her."

That course — it seemed a perfectly obvious one to the man who suggested it — proved unnecessary, for an opening in the crowd at that moment revealed her, her and the little shrimp Hollister at her side. Their view lasted perhaps five seconds, and for the better part of one of them her eyes were on John Chance. All around them, in literal fulfilment of the terms of the prophecy, people mounted their tables and craned their

necks, and many scrambled out into the street to follow her. But the two men sat just as they were for rather a long time, in silence. It was Chance who broke it, speaking in a rather dry, analytical voice.

"It's partly her hair — partly. You're right in saying it flames, and yet it hasn't a particle of red about it. It's a little the color of deep water with sunlight through it. That sounds fanciful, but it's not far wrong. But it's more in her eyes. She has the most — the most curious, questioning eyes I ever saw. I wonder how far a man might go to satisfy that look — or to set it alight again."

He was silent for a while after that; then he shook his head, and with a rather rueful laugh, turned upon his friend. "Confound you, it's all in the carnival. But you're right; she doesn't belong in the same world with Tommy Hollister. And she oughtn't — a girl like that — to be loose in Paris at all to-day. I'd like to know how fast her pulse is going and what pitch her nerves are keyed to."

"They're nothing to what they'll be before the day is over. That crowd of young savages from the Julian are getting up a float, and they mean to take her away from Hollister and put

her up on it and haul her down the Boulevard. There'll be no stopping them, either; they'll have all the crowd with them. That's when the real sensation will begin, the sort of thing that makes the authorities nervous. Why, if that girl should start singing the Marseillaise, she could take the whole crowd across the river and sack the Luxembourg."

"And when the show is over," said Chance, thoughtfully, "a girl like that, — blazing like that, — she will be burnt out as clean as the ash on this cigar. That is, supposing they do get her in the first place."

"They'll do that. As a matter of fact, there comes the float now. And only think how she'll look up on top of it! They do things well, those boys, when they seriously set out not to be serious." His enthusiasm mounted as the float came slowly nearer along the Boulevard. "Can't you see how she'll blaze, up there? And isn't it bully architecture, the way it all leads up to where she'll be? And where do you suppose they commandeered those three big white Normans to pull it? Just unhooked them from a passing bus, likely enough. — Oh, she's too inevitably a part of it to get off. Come along and see."

"I think," said Chance, rather slowly, "that I'll stay here."

"Bones too old for the fires of spring to get into them?" Well, mine aren't. So long." And he was out of range of a reply in the crowd that pressed along behind the empty float.

Chance caught the eyes of a waiter and ordered two fresh glasses of coffee. One was for himself, and he explained the other to the waiter by saying that the gentleman would return in a moment. It gave him rather more elbow room, having two chairs. He might not want the extra one at all, but it was in his mind that he might. Associated with this idea was a certain smiling incredulity over his friend's remark that it would be impossible to stop those young savages from Julian's. Impossible was a pretty big word.

With that reflection, he settled back into the spirit of the carnival. He was at the beginning of his holiday, he was in the most irresponsible of places on the most irresponsible day of the year, and he did not propose to waste it worrying over the antics, or the fate — though it was likely to be tragic enough — of any American girl who had been silly enough to go out with Tommy Hollister. He could not pretend that it was not

a pity she had done it, but once he had acknowledged it was a pity, which he ungrudgingly did, his duty was fully performed. He could make himself comfortable, and take little sips of smoke and coffee — he lighted a fresh cigar to prove it — and sprinkle confetti over the lady in paper satin magenta, just as he had been doing before his friend had come along to stir him with talk about a resurrection angel. “The fires of spring,” indeed! The man who wrote that line would never have gone pushing about in the crowd. He would have stayed right here at his little table, contented to leave the event with Allah, where it belonged. Chance felt grateful to his friend for having quoted the line, and to old Omar Khayyam for having written it.

Whoever was to have charge of the event, Allah, or those young savages from the Julian, it was clear enough that an event was coming off. There was some sort of leaven at work out there in the crowd, the organizing force of some single focal idea: the stream was flowing all one way now; people had ceased strolling and were going somewhere. Those who could not move for the press were standing on tiptoe, their hands on any pair of shoulders that offered support,

looking up the Boulevard toward the Madeleine. The people about him in the café were looking too, in the same direction, and though he felt sure there was nothing to see, and in spite of the restraining influence of Omar, John Chance leaned far out and craned his neck with the rest. He was, in fact, so busy looking that a stranger who had laid hands on his extra chair, was in the very act of dragging it away before Chance observed him. Then he laid a detaining hand upon it.

"Pardon," he said, nodding toward the untouched glass of coffee, "madame will return in a moment." The Frenchman raised his polished hat and expressed thousands of polished apologies, while Chance, equally serious, prolonging the scene all he could just to see how far so tenuous a situation could be made to stretch, replied with an equal number of thousands of regrets at being obliged to assume so disobliging an attitude.

He was talking over his shoulder, for the Frenchman stood behind him, so that for the first time his eyes were away from the Boulevard, and as he ran on with his inexhaustible stock of regrets, he suddenly became aware that he had lost the man's attention. The attitude was still politely at his service, but the eyes, with an odd expres-

sion in them, were looking beyond him. Others were looking the same way, men and women were getting to their feet, and one heard a metallic scraping sound as the little iron chairs and tables were moved about. Chance turned.

The Boulevard was no longer a river, it was a turbulent lake; a lake of faces all turned toward him. And right before him, not five feet away, stood, incarnate, the idea that had transformed the crowd, the lambent girl, the cathedral candle, burning, the prospective sacrifice to the spirit of carnival.

But that was not the way he saw her. For the moment he took for granted her beauty and her mystery; his trained, observant eyes were busy with details. His former impression that she was fantastically dressed for the carnival was wrong; she had simply assumed the shackles of convention and conquered them. She wore a long half-fitting coat of ivory broadcloth; her small, smart toque was in the same tone, with a warm touch of sable about it. At her throat was an immense and very fine opal in an *art nouveau* setting of pearls. She was quite alone, the soiled little man who had been her companion having disappeared. She was breathing fast, and a faint quiver observable in her eyelids and about her

fine nostrils and lips indicated an overmastering excitement. She had the air of standing still only because she did not know which way to turn, and a look that might turn to fear but was at the moment hardly more than perplexity.

Clearly she did not know; had she known, her look would have spoken no mere half-humorous dismay, but downright terror. Chance knew. He knew the reckless, good-humored, highly talented young savages who had improvised that float, and who meant now to enthrone her on it, knew them because he had once been one of them, and in a way was one of them still. There came pretty vividly to his mind the memory of a half-naked young beauty who had queened it all one night at a Quat'z' Arts ball, and from that picture his mind ran ahead to the hour when this present brief reign of Misrule should be over, to the time when this cathedral candle, burnt low and guttered, should be put out. If they had her for their queen to-night, to-morrow — well, she would belong in the same soiled, spent world with Tommy Hollister. They meant to have her. The rules of the game were all in their favor, the spirit of the day, the temper of the crowd, and more than all, the imperative fitness of the

girl for the position they had designed for her. They were coming for her now, worming their way through the mob — it was a mob, you could tell by the noise it made. Chance could see here and there about the outskirts of it the white batons of ineffectual gendarmes.

And at that he smiled, a buoyant, boyish smile. Allah had turned the job over to him!

The girl stood there, not five feet away, looking straight into his face. And his job was to take her away from those highly talented, perfectly merciless young savages, and return her, virginal of soul, to whoever was responsible for her. It was a large order — his friend's statement that a platoon of police could not do it was probably well within the truth. Perhaps that was why Allah had turned the job over to him.

So he stood there, his hat in his hand, smiling a pleased, boyish, half-shy sort of welcome to her. Then he held out his hand.

"Here's your chair, waiting for you," he said, "and here's your coffee. I'd begun to be afraid you weren't coming."

Her answering smile was instantaneous. All day she had been aware that she was just a spectacle in the great crowd, but still something

utterly apart from it, and the consciousness had induced a wild sort of exhilaration that missed being happiness only because of a vague disquiet which underlay it all. But in this smile of friendly welcome, in the boyish mixture of eagerness and deference of voice and word, there was something sane and wholesome; something that quieted her excitement and at the same time made her fear seem a little ridiculous. Somehow it took her away altogether from this garish world of confetti and made her think of a sparkling early morning and a southwest wind riffing over the sand-dunes. She had an impulse to take the outstretched hand in a good grip and sit down beside the man who held it out to her.

She was sure she did not know him. He was completely a stranger, and his friendly greeting, pleasant as it was, could be nothing after all but a fresh trick of the carnival. Still she was not sorry that she had smiled back at him, and she rewarded his invitation with a not unfriendly shake of the head as she turned away. At that he spoke again, lower, and so swiftly that the words trod on each other's heels.

"You've only a minute left. Don't be frightened, but sit down here. Quick."

The violence of the surprise drenched her face with color. With an impulse of obedience that was wholly automatic, she seated herself in the chair he pointed out. Then she turned and looked at him curiously. The eager, buoyant confidence was still in his face; there was even a half smile about his big, expressive mouth. But she saw something else that made her feel sure that there was more than the mere folly of the carnival involved in the adventure. He was looking at her, too, but not personally nor exclusively. His thoughtful eyes seemed to be taking her in merely as a part of the scene.

"That's better, but it's not good enough yet." His eyes strayed from her to some one else, an absurd figure of a woman in a screaming magenta gown, snowed up in blue confetti, a gaudy, Bon Marché cloak and a big bushy hat. Then they came back to her.

"I want you to give me your hat; your hat and your coat too. I want them for a present."

It was the third complete surprise that he had dashed over like so many buckets of water, since their acquaintance had begun, considerably less than a minute ago. This time the deeper curiosity in her eyes took fire.

"I know you're in earnest," she said slowly, "but I don't in the least understand why. You don't know me and — well, I don't know you, either."

"Not each other's names. But you do know that I'm the other sort from Tommy Hollister. And I know that you don't belong up on top of that float — a six hours' Boulevard sensation. Won't you give me your hat and coat? Quickly?"

The light in her face seemed to flare up at that, and her lips parted. "Is that what they wanted?" she said, quietly enough. "But they won't take me if I don't want to go. I'm safe here with you."

"Don't look up; but listen. They'll be in over the tables in a minute. It's a Paris crowd, and it's only waiting for a spark. You have to handle it like guncotton. It's not dangerous if you know how, and it's my trade to handle crowds. I'll help you with your coat. Don't stand up. Don't look up."

She disobeyed him; for just one moment she looked. Then, with bowed head and shaking fingers, she began unpinning her hat. The crowd she had been a part of, the endless stream of staring, good-humored persons had transformed itself. The close-packed inner ring, which was all she

could see, holding on by main force against the grinding, milling compression that was going on behind; the flushed faces and spirituous eyes, the palpable excitement that mounted higher and higher as the physical pressure increased; the sense of unmeasured and uncontrollable physical strength which the ineffectual rise and fall, here and there, of the white batons of the police only made the more terrifying — it all proclaimed one fact. They ceased to be many, that crowd, had become one, and this one a sort of monstrous deformation of humanity.

When she lowered her eyes they were unsteady with panic. At that moment the only stable thing in her universe was John Chance's hands on her shoulders, waiting till she had got off her hat to strip the coat back from them.

A moment later, with the hat, a marvel of Brussels point and sable, balanced on his fingers, and the long white coat over his arm, Chance sprang up on the table.

Once there he became curiously deliberate. He had shifted the focus of the mob from the girl to himself and he continued to hold it. Standing there, grave in manner, serious voiced, he made the mob feel that he knew exactly what he

was going to do next and that they did not, and that they must wait just a minute longer to see. Before saying anything, he turned the coat about on his arm to give him access to a large inside pocket, from which he then drew its contents, — a spare pair of gloves, a handkerchief, and a small card-case. These he stowed away in a pocket of his own. Then he addressed the crowd at large.

“Madame my wife —” he began, but at that the crowd interrupted him with a roar of derision. He waited in smiling good humor for a chance to go on, and presently they gave it to him. If his next words were to be as amusing as these, they would be worth waiting for.

“Madame my wife returns these beautiful garments, these borrowed plumes, to the true queen of the carnival, to whom they belong. And since it grows late, and the little ones will be waiting, she asks the return of her own cloak and hat. With ten thousand thanks.” And at that he bowed, seriously and respectfully, to the lady in magenta.

The effect was galvanic. The woman’s two escorts sprang to their feet as though stung, and her own face shone purple through the rouge.

But in her eye Chance saw the thing he had been counting on, the betraying glint of avarice. The crowd was roaring again, and under cover of the noise he spoke to her. "You'll do my wife a great favor if you'll take it, and if you don't, the crowd will. If you'll give me yours, and pin this on your head, you'll be safe with it. But you must do it quickly."

With just one more glance at the Brussels lace, she began unpinning her own hat, dismissing her husband's horrified protest with a mere shrug of her ample shoulders. In another moment the exchange was effected, and the attention of the crowd transferred to the vivacious domestic squabble it entailed. With the bushy hat in his hand and the Bon Marché cloak over his arm, Chance climbed down from the table, while the crowd, with its fixed idea somewhat out of focus, uttered uncertain murmurs.

But at this moment a new voice was heard, one that had no uncertainty about it. The speaker stood by Chance's vacant chair, a good-looking young Frenchman, dressed in clothes that had evidently been made across the Channel. His soft hat had a tilt to it, his slender mustaches a finely pointed upward twist; he carried a little

rattan for a cane, and one of his eyes blinked behind a monocle. He was talking English that appeared more broken than it really was, and addressing his remark to the girl.

“Madame no doubt prefers the homage of her husband to any other?” he ventured politely. Her face confirmed his suspicion that she had not understood the purport of her latest escort’s oration, and he went on swiftly.

“Mademoiselle, we students would like to express our admiration and present our homage, too, our respectful homage, to the most beautiful woman in the world. The throne we have built for you is not, indeed, worthy, but it is our best, and it will not — will not make you ridiculous, as this gentleman seems to have it in mind to do.” With that he turned, and she did too, upon John Chance, standing there with the bushy hat in his hand and the bargain cloak over his arm. They smelled strong of cheap perfume even at a distance, and the broad collar of the cloak was greasy. At that a new emotion showed in her face, — angry, flat rebellion.

“Get my own back, please,” she said, as imperiously as if she had been a queen indeed. “I will not wear these; I will not be ridiculous.

And if they want me to be queen of the carnival —”

She was blazing now as she had blazed when she walked by the café with Tommy Hollister, and the people had mounted their tables and cheered her. She dazzled Chance, but at the same time she betrayed the Frenchman into a serious mistake. Without giving her time to finish the sentence, his rôle of respectful meekness falling from him like a garment, he sprang upon the table and began shouting to the crowd in a voice that had the wire edge of reckless triumph in it. She did not understand the words, but the tone of them and the sound they drew from the crowd turned her pale again. There was fear as well as defiance in her next words to Chance.

“We sail for home to-morrow morning. I can’t buy anything else to wear, and — and I *won’t* go ashore at New York in those.”

Chance answered her in a tone so matter-of-fact, so free from every trace of emphasis, that his words had the staggering effect of a blow.

“If you will tell me where you can buy a new immortal soul to-morrow, you may have your coat and hat again.”

For a moment she stared at him; then with a shudder she buried her head in her arms, and stayed so until roused again by his voice. "Can you pin this on yourself?" he asked. "I'd better not try to touch you."

She looked up and held out her hands for the bushy hat. He dropped the cloak across her knees and stepped up on the table behind the Frenchman, interrupting him with a tap on the shoulder. Again it was obvious that he had something to say, and even the orator waited to see what it would be.

"Volunteers are wanted," he announced, with a grin. "Twenty strong men to unpin a hat from the unwilling head of one lady and fasten it upon the unwilling head of another. Are there any engineers present? Any sappers or miners? Any volunteers whatever for a work of especial difficulty?"

He turned to the young man on the table beside him. "You, monsieur, will you not be the first? A mere matter of some lace and a few pins, and twenty strong men to help you?"

The crowd roared at this, and their many-voiced derision betrayed the young man into an exhibition of temper. He flushed, and his hand

tightened as he drew back his rattan with a hint of menace.

It was not much, but it served. It violated flagrantly the spirit of the day, and it gave John Chance the victory. He laughed, and playfully tossed a handful of confetti over his opponent.

"This is the carnival," he said, "not the Fourteenth of July. You shall play at the fall of the Bastile next summer."

Then for the last time he turned to the magenta lady and emptied the last of his confetti over her. "Long live the queen!" he cried. "The true queen of the carnival."

Deliberately he climbed down from the table and seated himself beside the girl. She was no longer lambent, no longer the great cathedral candle, burning; she was just a shaken, exhausted young girl, her beauty in temporary eclipse under a bargain cloak and a big bushy hat with drifts of confetti over it.

"Waiter," said Chance, "bring a fresh glass of coffee. This of madame my wife has become cold."

## CHAPTER III

### LOOKING GLASS COUNTRY

So far as the mob was concerned, the adventure was over. All the girl had to do now, he told her, was to sit tight and drink her coffee as if she liked it. The crowd was transformed back to what it had been an hour before, an endless stream of idle, good-humored folk, exhibiting no more concern over this girl who had so wrought upon them and the man who had just beaten them than over any other couple.

Over his own coffee Chance was carrying on a desultory monologue as nearly as might be in the vein he would have taken if he and this acquaintance of ten vivid minutes had been, instead, old married people, a little tired after a long holiday together and mildly impatient to get home. All at the same time, in the back of his head, he was casting about for some plan for disposing of her, and with his eyes was automatically surveying the crowd.

But it was not many minutes before one face out of the stream that flowed by brought his widely dispersed wits into instant focus,— the face of Tommy Hollister. He stood just where the girl had stood, and was staring at her, a little in drink, but not far enough to have forgotten that he had abandoned her to the crowd, nor quite to dare speak to her until a glance of recognition should give him some sort of leave. And before that happened, before she raised her eyes, Chance spoke himself, blandly, half smiling, in much the manner and in the same tongue in which he had addressed the crowd.

“Talk to me, and in French, if you have anything to say. If you speak to her or say a word in English to either of us, I will knock you down and call the police. I don’t know which of us they’d arrest, but I guess it would be you. Anyhow, you’d have the black eye.”

At Hollister’s sullen reply (evidently he agreed in Chance’s forecast of the result of speaking in English, for it was in the argot of the “Boule’ Miche’” that he answered), at the sound of his thick, syruppy voice, the girl shuddered visibly. Somehow just the sound of it interpreted much that she had been seeing and hearing all day,

uncontaminated, because unconscious of contamination. Then, as once before, she felt John Chance's hand on her shoulder, resting there a moment in a casual, matter-of-fact sort of caress while he tilted his chair back on its hind legs.

He was speaking now himself, and though her finishing-school French was of no use in translating what he said, she was pleasantly aware that a clean-cutting edge underlay his good-humored manner. She caught the contemptuous staccato in his use of the second person, singular, and when the speech ended as a snapper ends a whiplash, with a "*Va-t-en!*" she knew that Tommy Hollister was dismissed, finally and forever, so far as she was concerned, to his own world, whence an indiscreet letter of introduction and a credulous aunt had conjured him.

The little dash of pleasurable excitement about the episode had, for a moment, a tonic effect. She turned to the man beside her, the man whose name she did not know and of whose identity she had no hint, the man whose hand still rested half affectionately on her shoulder, smiled and said, "Thank you." The tone was easy, gracious, without emphasis and without embarrassment,

and it caused Chance to turn rather red and take his hand away.

"You spoke in French so that I couldn't understand, didn't you?" she asked.

He turned redder still. "Gracious! you didn't, I hope?"

She smiled again over his open alarm, and answered that she had not. "Not the words, at least."

But she was a long way from stable equilibrium yet; it was only a minute before the pendulum swung back again. She shivered and pressed her bare palms against her eyes, with a whispered exclamation of half-sick physical disgust.

"He's not worth it," said Chance. "A poor thing, to be sure, but there are thousands like him in this town, and no one of them will ever have a chance to speak to you again. You're wasting enough good current on him to make a flash of lightning, when he's not really worth more than a rap with a fly-killer."

"Yes, he's gone," she assented lifelessly, and then added, with a shaky laugh, "and he's the one person in Paris that I know by name."

Chance took this rather tremendous announcement without betraying any surprise; in fact,

surprise is hardly the name for the sensation it gave him. It piqued his curiosity and it pleased him by adding a difficulty to a problem which he was beginning to fear would turn out to have a perfectly commonplace solution.

Who in the world could she be? An American clear to the surface, innocent of Continental veneer; evidently of his own class, or more exactly, a cut or two above the class into which he had drifted, — the sort of girl his mother would have approved of, — a girl with a bloom so delicate that the first touch of a rude hand would rub it off. And this girl sat beside him in front of a Boulevard café on *Mardi Gras*, her only authorized protector the man he had just dismissed. Chance would have enjoyed, rather, an opportunity to free his mind to whatever idiot it was who had abandoned her to such hands.

She made an effort to get her former momentary manner back again, but without much success. "That was true," she said, "— about my not knowing any one else in Paris, but it isn't so bad as it sounds. You mustn't bother about me any more. I shall never forget what you've done for me, and some day I shall tell you better — but won't you leave me alone now? I shall

get on — somehow.” She paused to get control of her voice again, said, “Please — please go —” and stopped there only because it would not obey her further.

“Pretty soon,” he said. “Neither of us is in a hurry.”

As a matter of fact, he was in a hurry; he must find some sort of plan at once if he was to be of any further service to her. And she needed help badly. To get on “somehow,” to set about finding her own way out of the woods, was something she would doubtless be competent enough to do once she was fairly poised again on her feet. But it was something she was obviously unfit to try just now, shaken as she was, overwrought, swaying back and forth between a lambent excitement and a slack, nerveless depression. She would not let him sit there thinking very much longer, either, and he thought fast.

There were plenty of the right sort of good American home folk who would, in the natural course of things, be pressing their latch-keys upon him as soon as they knew he was in town, who would be really pleased to take the girl in for as long as might be necessary. She could have her choice of a temporary mother or sister or maiden

aunt, just about as she pleased; and then there was the Girls' Club over in the rue Chevreuse. But he felt an instinctive certainty that allowing him to present her at any one of these places, along with such explanations as might seem appropriate, was precisely the last service in the world that she would accept from him. And he felt pretty sure, moreover, that she would not allow him a single miss, that the very first suggestion of his which failed to carry her would put an end to his hold upon her and his power to help her.

It was the shabby cloak she wore that again came to his assistance. "Those clothes," he said, "are a bit depressing to me, and I guess they affect you in about the same way. I gave away your others, and I'm not going to leave you stranded with these. You can't get any more to-night because every store in Paris is shut tight, but I can, and I'm going to."

Without waiting for a sign of assent, and equally without excuses or explanations, he left his seat and went into the café. His only errand was to order a cab brought up to the side entrance in the rue Auber, a thing he could have accomplished as well from his place beside her,

only that this method gave her more chance to wonder and less to question him.

When he returned it was to say, "Here's our cab, and a horse that really goes on all four legs, which is pretty good luck in Paris. You're ready, aren't you?"

"But I'm not going with you," she said. "I won't be left on anybody's hands, and I won't let you bother about me any more. Won't you, please, just leave me alone? I shall get on all right — somehow."

"We can talk about that in the cab. It will be more comfortable and less conspicuous than standing here. You're not afraid to trust me so far, are you?"

It was not much of a resistance she had made, but the best she was capable of. With a nod of acquiescence she obeyed his gesture, preceded him through the café and out to the cab in the rue Auber. They drove off in silence. So long as he made no explanation, suggested no plan, simply left her to the grateful dark, the comfort of the soft cushions and the soothing, swaying motion of the cab as it sped over the asphalt, she was content to remain inert, ignorant of what lay before her.

She did not know where they were going; she had a glimpse of the river over the rampart of one of the bridges, a long view of the tapering lights of a quiet, dignified boulevard, and then their way threaded a tangle of narrow, twisting streets, and brought them up at last in the bottom of a mean and rather ill-smelling impasse, the predominant odor, the left-over smell of a laundry, being explained by a large black and white sign, LAVOIR, across the blank wall at the foot of the street.

"Back in five minutes," was all he said when the cab stopped, and with that he disappeared through an open gate and down a dark little alley.

Any idea she might have entertained of taking this opportunity to slip away and escape was dispelled by a single look at her surroundings. The wretched little shops, the groups of hulking figures in the street, whose gestures seemed so bellicose and whose voices so menacing, the weird, strident cries of an old woman peddling Camembert cheese, the effect of all this was to make her shrink as far back as she could into the corner of the cab and to make John Chance's five minutes seem very long indeed.

She was not much surprised, though, on sight of him coming back, to see that he had a woman's hat in his hand and a woman's coat over his arm. He had said he would get them, and she had come to take him for granted. But she uttered a little exclamation of genuine pleasure when he put them into her hands; they had the feel of her own clothes; they were her kind of clothes unmistakably.

"The hat will look well on you," he said, "and I think the coat will fit. You're about the same dimensions. Anyhow, they take off the curse of the others; putting those dreadful things on you was the first act of downright desecration I ever committed, and I hope it will be the last."

He helped her out of the bargain cloak, wrapped it around the bushy hat which she had taken off, and laid the bundle on the floor of the cab while he helped her into the trim-lined, military-looking coat he had brought for her. While she was pinning on the new hat, he took up the discarded bundle and eyed it with a thoughtful smile; then he took a look about the impasse. A short-legged, stodgy-looking man, with a good deal of bourgeois importance about him, was coming

down the sidewalk ahead of his meagre, ill-dressed wife. Him Chance accosted, seriously, and with an elaborate, commanding courtesy.

"Pardon, monsieur," he said, and without another word placed the bundle in the man's helpless, outstretched hands. He lifted his hat, sprang with a kind of cat-like quickness to his seat beside the girl, and as he shouted an address to the grinning cabman they wheeled smartly around and clattered out of the impasse. Through the back window of the cab they could see the man still standing there, the bundle still in his hands, his outraged dignity venting itself on his ill-dressed wife. When they passed the next light, Chance looked at the girl beside him. There was good natural color in her face, and the remains of a smile.

She rebelled again, though, when the cab pulled up before what she discovered to be a restaurant, and he, after stepping out himself, intimated that she was to alight.

"I'm not nearly so silly as I was," she said, "but I honestly don't want anything to eat. Please get it for yourself, and let me wait for you out here. I don't believe I could even look a dinner in the face."

There came a glint of mischief into his eyes. "You needn't," he said; "I promise I won't ask you to. But won't you share two cups of coffee with me?"

"That's not much to do — for you," she said.

The room felt pleasantly warm after so many hours in the sharp February air; in fact, it was only now that she realized how cold she had been. She took off her gloves, and it was his glance that directed her attention to the blue at the bases of her finger nails.

"This coffee does taste good," she admitted. "I'm glad you made me come in."

He gave an order to the waitress. "I wish I could understand French," she said. "There were two words then that sounded grotesquely like plum pudding. I wonder what they meant. I suppose they never heard of one of those over here, but it would be good, wouldn't it?"

And when it came in, crackling triumphantly amid blue flames, she could not quite keep back an exclamation of delight. It was set down between them, and she held out her cold hands and warmed them over the little blaze it made. Presently she noticed that the waitress had put down two plates before him.

"I wish I could have some," she said plaintively. "It smells so good. But you can't offer me any. You promised."

"I promised I wouldn't ask you to look a dinner in the face. You're not. You're going to approach it stealthily from behind."

Her eyes widened. "You're not going to make me —" she began, but Chance interrupted her with another order to the waitress. And at sight of the start of amazement with which this order was received, her face took an expression to match Chance's own, grave, indifferent, and her eyes, full of smiling mockery, accepted the challenge in his.

Deliberately, punctiliously, they ate that dinner backward, course by course, salad, roast, vegetable, entrée, fish, soup, hors-d'œuvre, behaving over it as any two quiet, well-bred, matter-of-fact young people would be expected to behave over their dinner. Their talk, until they had finished the hors-d'œuvre of radishes and caviar, was quite fragmentary and inconsequential. Then she said, "You're going to smoke, aren't you?"

He hesitated. "Not just before dinner, I guess."

"You didn't smoke right after," she retorted. "Anyway, that would be carrying the joke too far. And it will feel more natural if you do."

She was quite right about it, and he assented. She let him get his cigar well alight, then settled back a little in her chair, as if, somehow, the preliminaries were finally out of the way, and the real thing, whatever it might turn out to be, about to begin.

She began by checking off on her fingers.

"I've run off with a man I don't know, to a place I don't know. I don't know whose clothes I have on, and I've just eaten my dinner backward. I feel as if I must have gone through the looking glass."

"Why that?" he asked rather suddenly.

"It was what Alice did, you know; I suppose I thought of it because some one was telling me about a place called that at the Pittsburg fair last summer, and I thought it would have been fun to see it. But this is nicer; this is the real thing. I never knew there was such a country, and I don't a bit want to go back to the other — the country where you always know just what to expect and have to take things called consequences. I've a lot of questions to ask; and

the first one is, whose pretty clothes are these, and why did you go into that dreadful alley to get them, and are they bought or borrowed or stolen?"

"I'll answer no questions," he said, "except in the way of barter."

She nodded, smiling. "How many does that one of mine exchange for? Never mind; I'll pay."

"You might have seen those clothes on the boulevard this afternoon; I did. They belong to the famously pretty wife of a pretty famous portrait painter. She has the best-looking clothes of any American on the left bank. She buys them, that is; she never has them, for they're always being borrowed to be painted. She had three gowns in the Salon last year, and one of them got an H. C., and was bought for the Luxembourg. She's been very much set up about that ever since."

The girl looked at him rather dubiously. "Have a lot of models been wearing these to be painted in?"

"Oh, they're quite new; she just got them home to-day, herself."

"And she loaned them to you? What did you have to tell her?"

"Just that I wanted to borrow them. She said she had never had any of her gowns treated architecturally before, and seemed quite pleased."

"You're an architect?" she asked quickly.

"Not by a long way," he told her. "But I played at it once."

"Well, why, if they have money enough to buy such clothes, do they have to live in that dreadful alley?"

"Down that alley is a perfect burrow of interesting people, as thick as rabbits. They live there because they like it, and there's no one to tell them they mustn't."

"How much better it would be," she said, with hot young scorn, "if they all had to live in a row of brownstone houses and do exactly what a lot of stupid people who don't know any better think they ought to. — Well, now I'll answer your first question; it ought to have been mine, too, if I'd been polite. My name is Cynthia —"

He interrupted quickly enough to forestall the next word. "And mine is John," he said, "but we mustn't tell each other any more than that."

She looked at him for an instant in simple astonishment, then with a grave sort of curiosity.

"Why?" she asked. "You've done enough for me to deserve to know who it was for, and I've let you do so much I ought to be told who did it."

"If I were to let you tell me, I'd have to go into a pigeonhole with all the other young men who've done you a small service for the sake of scraping your acquaintance; I guess that pigeonhole is fairly full already, and I like more room, myself. And then, if you don't know my last name, you'll have to call me John, and I shall call you Cynthia — and shall remember you that way."

She smiled faintly over that, but it was to the idea that went before that her next words referred. "I don't imagine that you've ever found yourself crowded in a pigeonhole, or that you ever will. But what is your first question, if you don't want to know who I am?"

"How Tommy Hollister ever got to know you, and who it was — oh, not by name — who abandoned you to his protection this afternoon. It was an act of incredible folly, whoever did it."

The words were uttered without emphasis or color, just as they had been in the afternoon when he had spoken of her immortal soul, and

they stung like the unlooked-for touch of the spur.

"It's I who am the incredible fool, then," she said with an edge of anger in her voice. "But it happened naturally enough. We sail for home to-morrow, and my aunt can't sleep on the train, so she went on to Cherbourg this noon. I wanted to see the carnival, so I stayed with Mr. Hollister, and was to take the boat train to-night. I didn't exactly like him, but he was introduced to us in a perfectly regular way, by a letter from Mr. Pole, Mr. Moberly Pole, the portrait painter. He painted a portrait, several portraits, of me, and when we were coming over he said he would see that Mr. Hollister looked after us while we were here. And he has been very nice to us; very attentive, that is, — he meant to be nice. Oh, it was foolish, dreadfully foolish, but it wasn't incredible, if you only knew. I shall always remember you and go on thanking you for taking me away from him and sending him off to where I'll never see him again, but —"

She broke off there with a rather startled look which puzzled Chance by resolving into an expression of half-humorous dismay, the humor coming to the surface and the dismay fading

out during the little pause that ensued before she spoke again. When she did, her eyes had a glint of mocking defiance in them, too.

"You don't know what it means to me," she said, "to have found this Looking-Glass Country. I've been looking for it all my life. You live in it, and you don't know what the other is like, the silly people you're expected to make friends with, the silly things you're expected to do, stupid, proper, empty things. That was what I broke away from this afternoon — just for a breath — I needed it. And now, in spite of my 'incredible folly,' I've found what I've been looking for always. And, please, I'm not going away. I don't have to say I won't because I just thought of a reason why I can't. That was why I laughed. Mr. Hollister has my purse with my money and my tickets and my letter of credit — everything. So I couldn't possibly go to-night, anyway. I'll have to telegraph Aunt Augusta to come back."

Chance looked at his watch deliberately, absently rather, and then up at her, smiling in a manner singularly free from mockery, and shook his head. "Incredible folly, just the same," he said, "though I don't think it's you who are the incredible fool. But who in the world is

responsible for you? Who is it you have to mind?"

"To mind?" she repeated incredulously. "Like a child? But I'm grown up; I don't have to mind anybody." A ripple of amusement came over her face. "You've made me do more things this one afternoon than any one else has — since I was little — ever so little."

"Everybody has to mind, grown up or not," said Chance. "If they don't have to mind a person who's responsible for them, they have to mind a thing they're responsible for. But you're not grown up. You haven't a job."

He had a stump of a pencil in his hand and had been scrawling little decorations in the margin of the wine list while he talked. He looked up now and found that same deeper curiosity which he had noted in his first glance at her alight in her eyes.

"Tell me more about that," she commanded. "Tell me what you mean."

"Why, this is the nub of it," he said, and his unconscious pencil began making a little star in the middle of the paper; "when you're a child, you're a part of some one else's job, and you have to mind that person because he's responsible for

you. But when you've a job of your own, when there's a piece of work that you have to mind because it's up to you, then you're grown up. I've known boys of twelve who were, and men of forty who weren't. But either way you've got to mind something, or you're on the way to everlasting smash."

"But how can you obey people who don't know anything," she protested hotly; "people who haven't it in them to make you obey, or how can you obey things that aren't worth doing? — like all the things I've ever had in my life? I've never had a better reason for doing a thing than that it was what everybody was supposed to do. That's why I want to stay here in the Looking-Glass Country."

"For just this evening," Chance said soberly, "you can go on obeying me." He clasped his hands and pushed them forward on the table. "I'm on a holiday, but I took a job this afternoon, the job of taking you away from Hollister, and from that crowd of young savages who meant to take you away from him, and handing you back safe" — he paused there; then went on, steadily and gravely, "handing you back as good as you were this morning — to whoever it was who was

responsible for you and had failed in his duty. I took the job; and I'm not through with it yet."

He was not looking at her nor she at him. Her hands were clasped, but under the table, for they were quivering like every other part of her. He had paused again, but after a moment went steadily on.

"If this were a looking-glass country I'd be inclined to let you stay in it, but it's not. Even that side-show faker at Pittsburg was nearer it. A man could go there and ride in the scenic railway or shoot the chutes and get the thrill of danger and abandonment without the consequences. Somebody that he didn't know about was responsible for his safety; that was somebody's job. He was free to yell and catch his breath and be as reckless and adventuresome as he pleased. Whenever he'd had enough he could stop, and when he was tired he could go away. He'd had two or three hours in a place where, apparently, there were no such things as consequences. But here —

"People come here," he went on, and now he looked up at her, "people without jobs, who think this is a looking-glass country. It looks like it, but you get what's coming to you here

just as surely as in a steel mill. Tommy Hollister was hunting for a looking-glass country, and if you asked him now where he lived, and he were capable of telling you the truth, which he isn't, he'd tell you he lived in Hell."

He pushed his chair back from the table and smiled at her with the same look of almost boyish deference that she had seen in his face when he had invited her to sit down at his table in front of the Café de la Paix. "We've just comfortable time for the boat train," he said.

She was holding tightly the edge of the table with both hands. "I can't go," she protested; "I haven't any money or ticket or anything."

He laughed. "That's my job," he said easily. "That doesn't concern you at all." Then, sobering suddenly, he reached across the table and took both her hands in his. It was a real grip; a little tighter and it would have hurt, and his eyes all the while held hers, calmly, coolly, with almost a smile in behind them, somewhere. When she remembered that moment afterward, it seemed almost that he had pulled her, physically, up over the brink of a precipice. "The big part of the job is yours," he said, "—and you've done it."

The grip of his hands slackened, became a sort of friendly caress; then he released her and came around behind her chair to help her on with her coat.

Five minutes before the hour for the train to leave they stood on the platform outside Cynthia's compartment. Her hand-bag had been extracted from the *consigne* where it had been deposited earlier in the day; she had her tickets and a handful of John Chance's bank-notes.

"We shall have to give up our mystery," she said, "because I shall have to know where to send the money—and the clothes." Then she laughed, for she caught a fleeting look which told her that this necessity had taken him unawares. He smiled too.

"Wait a minute," he said. Then, "Let me have one of your cards. Hand it to me face down," he added, as she was getting it out of her card-case. He pencilled on the back of it:—

Monsieur Jean

9 Impasse du Maine, Paris.

"You can send the clothes there," he said. "The concierge knows me, and will let me have them. As for the money—where do you bank? Monroe's?"

She nodded. He began feeling in his pockets. "I want something we can tear in two," he explained.

She drew an American dollar bill out of her card-case. "I've been carrying this around to remind me of home," she told him. "Will it do?"

"Just!" he said. He tore it across and handed one-half of it to her. "You can send it with a draft for the amount to Monroe's and tell them to deposit it to the account of the man who presents the other half. — And while you're about it, you'd better tell them to stop payment on the letter of credit. That's better than trying to get it back from Hollister."

It was time she was getting into the train. He helped her in. The guards were already locking the doors.

"Good-by," he said.

She held out both hands to him, seemed to catch at his and hold fast. "I don't know what I'm going to do," she said. "I shan't have you to — to make me mind, and there's nobody else."

"Get a thing to mind. That's better than a person. Get a job."

"Yes," she said.

He sprang down from the train and it pulled slowly out of the station.

He paused in the entrance to light a big cigar; then swung out gayly across the square. His holiday had begun well.

## CHAPTER IV

### ELLEN

BUT holidays end; and April found John Chance back in this country and deep in the job which he had agreed to mind for a good many months to come. Stein had thrown an unexpected interest into this job by asking him to get some part of the work done, to get up as brilliant and telling an effect as he possibly could, in time for the "Toil and Triumph" convention, which was to be held at Beechcroft on the tenth and eleventh of June.

To reach Beechcroft from New York you left the West Shore Railroad at a point where a rock-walled creek joined the Hudson, took the Kinderkill Valley Railroad to a subdued little village known as Broadrib's Station, and there, were you locally known as a "toiler," you entered a dusty, three-seated mountain wagon for the final stage of the journey. But if, instead of alighting at Broadrib's Station, you had gone on eight or

ten miles farther up the Kinderkill Valley, and had glanced out the car window, you would perhaps have observed, on a shed beside the track, the words, "Excelsior Siding." The name was not commemorative of Longfellow's poem; it indicated that here was the shipping-point for a small excelsior factory.

From the Geological Survey Map, which, mounted on linen, was always in a convenient pocket, Chance had learned that Excelsior Siding was much nearer the spot where he was to live and work for the next four months than was Broadrib's Station. It had been regarded as a less convenient place of approach because of the mountain ridge which separated Beechcroft Valley from the valley of the Kinderkill. The map told him, however, that the old wood road, which entered the upper Beechcroft by way of the Mt. William notch, while steep, was not impracticable for teams. This gave him what he wished, to begin with, — a base of supplies which was not on the railroad and not in a settlement; and it also gave him what was as good as a private road for his line of communications.

Accordingly, he built a power plant at the siding, and laid a cable through the notch for

the transmission of the electric current to his lamps at Beechcroft. He had finally got Stein's permission for those lamps. Directly in the notch, two miles from Beechcroft, stood the shops and shanties of his workmen. And midway down the road were the rough shacks, sided with pine slabs and roofed with hemlock bark, which were occupied by himself, Henry Baumann, his chief draughtsman, and Bill Hemenway. Here they could dress for either direction, in tunic and sandals for Beechcroft, in working clothes or business suit for the camp, Excelsior Siding, or New York. Here also was the draughting and model room. There were stables, with working and driving horses, at both the siding and the camp. Telephone wires connected the siding with the camp, the model room, and the temple site, with an extension down the valley to the home of Hobbema, Stein's "general overseer."

On a sunny afternoon, late in April, John Chance, — bareheaded, barearmed, barelegged, clad in knee-length gray tunic and gray sandals, — sat on a projecting ledge, far up on the hillside, gazing down into the upper valley. "It won't do," he was thinking, as he puffed slowly at a

brier pipe. "The whole valley is the wrong shape. It is too narrow and gloomy — it is all shadows, even at this time of day. I've got to change it — brighten it up — make it smile." He drew a pencil from the pocket of his tunic, tore off a broad strip of birch bark from the tree at his back, and began making desultory free-hand sketches.

The location of the buildings was a fixed quantity; they were to stand on the natural terrace which roughly encircled the little valley at a height of thirty to fifty or sixty feet above the stream. It was the narrow, winding gorge through which the stream came tumbling down that bothered him. It could only be widened and straightened into conventional terms at a prohibitive cost; and yet there it lay, a gloomy little jungle in the very centre of his picture.

Suddenly a question came into his eyes; then they lighted up with the answer. He began to sketch rapidly, almost nervously, on a fresh strip of bark. His eyes sought the notch, which partially separated the upper and lower valleys, and he nodded. Finally, after a long survey of the scene, he slipped the roll of bark into his pocket, and struck off down the old lumber trail

toward his shack. The problem was solved. It had been a pretty problem, of its kind; and it was with a feeling of keen satisfaction that he tramped through the fresh green woods, leaping the mossy logs that lay across the trail, and plunging through the little thickets of nettles and blackberries which had encroached upon it.

Henry Baumann was at work on the large clay model of the new Beechcroft when Bill Hemenway dropped in to pass the time of day. The superintendent of construction wore the valley costume. The draughtsman had hidden the greater part of his person behind an apron, which was smeared, like his hands, with the bluish clay. There were flecks of clay in his hair and in his full brown beard.

"I should think," he was saying, "that these people would know that they were getting fooled."

Hemenway, a wiry little man, shook his head. "Not for a minute, Henry. You don't know the human bird. And you in the show business."

"But when they see our men up here, how can they think they are doing the work themselves?"

"If I've learned anything these last ten years, Henry, it's that facts don't count with the crowd."

"What is it that counts, then?"

"Looks. You can do anything you like so long as you keep your face straight. It's losing your face that knocks you under. Those near-toil fakers think they built this place. Do you suppose they made those five miles of road to Broadrib's Station? Never. It takes sweat to make a road, and they ain't sweating much. Do you suppose they built the houses and shops?"

"I thought so."

"Never. The only building they ever put up was a hen-house for that man Hobbema. And have you seen it? It's going to blow down in the next high wind. They only make the dinky things. When there's real work wanted, Stein, or the other faker, hires some real men to do it. That don't bother 'em any. They go on talking about the flowering of beauty through toil. It ain't the things of this life that counts, Henry. It's the names of things. Barnum's the only real philosopher that's happened along lately — Barnum and Stein. Stein knows that the poor fools want to be lied to, when they're sick of themselves."

"Off course," said Baumann, musingly; "I am not a religious man. One off them looks like another to me."

"One of what?"

"One off religions."

"You don't call this a religion?"

"Yess, I do. It iss."

"Hardly," said Hemenway. But a troubled expression came into his face.

"You are one off them," said Baumann. "You wear their clothes."

Hemenway was looking down at his tunic. The troubled expression deepened.

"That iss where you are funny — odd," Baumann continued. "You are a religious man. Maybe it iss the names off things that counts with you. What counts with me iss my family, and my insurance, and the money in the savings bank."

Suddenly the tunic was pulled up over Hemenway's head, stripped off his arms, and thrown flying into a corner. The superintendent was aroused, and he stood forth in all the dignity of five feet and five inches of underclothing, spidery arms, and blazing eyes.

"What is it, boys?" asked a quiet voice.

Both turned, and saw John Chance, who had paused midway between the door and his roll-top desk. The Beechcroft costume set him off

very well. His face and neck, and his bare arms and shapely legs, were tanned an even brown by the spring sun.

"Now look here, Mr. Chance," cried Hemenway, "is this thing a religion, or ain't it?"

"Certainly it iss a religion," said Baumann, rubbing his hands on his apron.

"That's what I want to know, Mr. Chance. Is Henry right, or ain't he?"

"It iss a religion, and 'Toil and Triumph' iss their Bible."

"You hear what Henry says. Now I've stuck by you, Mr. Chance, and I haven't a word of complaint about the way you've treated me. You tell me to ride the wild elephant, or to bring down the bronze lady from Madison Square tower, or to go out and blow up your touring car, and I do it to-night. I don't ask questions, and I don't send somebody else. I do it. But you've never asked me to change my religion, Mr. Chance. I'm a Methodist, and I'm going to stay a Methodist. If that circus dress means that I ain't a Methodist any longer, it stays right there, and I go out."

He paused for breath.

"It iss a religion," said Henry Baumann.

"Is it, or ain't it?" cried Bill Hemenway.

Chance shook his head good-humoredly. "I never thought of calling it a religion," he said. And observing that his superintendent was still in doubt, he added, "I think of it as a show."

He seated himself at the desk, glanced at the pile of correspondence which was awaiting his attention, and pressed a button. In a moment his stenographer, a young man, entered, notebook in hand. Chance took up the letters, and either dictated a reply to each or jotted down a memorandum on the margin. When the stenographer had withdrawn, with a full evening's work before him, he took up the sheets which the timekeeper and the accountant had turned in, and made a note or two on his scratch pad. Next he tipped back in his swivel chair, pad on knee, and jotted down a number of items which he hung up on the hook marked "Purchasing Agt.," on the wall beside the desk.

These matters disposed of, he swung around, and asked Hemenway and Baumann to draw up chairs.

"I have a job for you boys," he said, — "a real job, this time. We're going to floor the upper valley."

The two assistants looked at each other. "Floor the upper valley —" mused Bill. "With jasper, maybe."

Chance smiled. "No, Bill, — with a looking-glass — with a lake. We're going to throw a dam across the notch, just above Hobbema's house. No one is to know of this until the morning of June tenth. We shall have nearly six weeks for preparation, but the actual work of throwing the dam together will be done at the last moment. We'll give them a little surprise. Now how fast can you build that dam?"

The two men looked at each other.

"What material?" asked the superintendent. "Concrete?"

Chance shook his head. "That would take too long. We shall use timber and planking, weighted down with stone. I'll have you start in pretty soon building masonry abutments on each side, fifty feet apart. They will appear to be buttresses for the promenade. You will put some men at work on the hillside—the south hillside, above the dam—getting out rock and breaking it up; and have an aerial trolley ready so that you can run the cables across after dark and slide the stone down. "Now, how much time shall you want for the work?"

"It could be done," observed the draughtsman, "in four or five days."

"We can beat that," Hemenway said, slowly and thoughtfully. "With everything ready, as you say, Mr. Chance, I could throw that dam together in two days. With a little luck to help, it might be done in thirty-six hours."

"I'll give you twelve to fifteen hours," said Chance.

"All right, sir."

"Plan to start in at six o'clock sharp, in the evening of June eighth."

"Build her at night?"

"Yes. That will give from the morning of June ninth to the morning of June tenth for the water to run in. By six or eight o'clock on the morning of June tenth, I want the lake brimful."

"All right, sir."

"Work up the details between you. I am ordering the materials now. Well, good night, boys."

"Good night, Mr. Chance."

When they had left the room, the two men looked at each other.

"He'd say it just that way, Henry, if he was asking us to drain out the East River before

supper so he could run his car over to Brooklyn without getting caught in the bridge crush."

The draughtsman thrust his pencil through the thick hair above his ear, and leading the way into his sleeping-room, seated himself on the bed. "He iss a genius, iss John Chance. He sees pictures — vishions. He flies to them — he iss impatient off men who haff their feet on the ground."

"You're talking about me, now, eh?"

"I am talking about John Chance. I, too, see the picture he sees. It is beautiful."

"All right, Henry. While you're seeing the pictures, I'm going to put in about three hours' —" he glanced at his watch — "about four hours' sleep. It's my job to build this here picture so everybody else can see it, and my feet stay right on the ground until she's done. If I was to go up in the air now, there'd be a holy show at Upper Beechcroft. Do you mind, Henry, the time the building fell in at Atlanta, a week before the opening, and John Chance sent for me. We put up a sign, 'Nothing daunted — Will open in Ten Days.' You painted the sign, and the boss and I put it up. And we did it — oh, we did it."

"Yess," repeated the draughtsman after him, "we did it."

"Well, good night to you, Henry." And with this the superintendent went to his room, set his alarm clock, and threw himself on the bed.

A few moments later the sound of wheels came in through the open windows, a horse was pulled up at the door, and after a moment the purchasing agent, a despondent-looking young man who wore his hat on the side of his head, entered the draughting room. He greeted John Chance with a half-perceptible wave of the hand and inclination of the head, and took down the order slips from the hook.

*Item* (he read), 6 self-dumping buckets for aerial trolley. (Do not let Green-Hackett Co. figure on this. They delayed the last job.)

*Item.* Pair of swans (extra large — white).

*Item.* Do. Blue herons.

*Item.* 160 timbers — 12" × 12" × 20'.

*Item.* 72 planks (undressed) — 2" × 12" × 16'8".

*Item.* First chair made by Morris.

*Item.* 3 bbls. hard grease. (Our claim of leakage on last order not yet allowed. See to this.)

*Item.* The oldest bell and the oldest pulpit in any of the California mission churches.

Must be attested by priest or caretaker and by mayor of nearest town.

*Item.* Coyote Bill's Wild West Show seized by sheriff last week at Paterson, N.J. Buy canvas enclosure at the sale, also dressing-tent.

*Item.* Gondola, with gondolier (must have tenor voice).

The purchasing agent, like Baumann and Hemenway, had been with John Chance in all his enterprises, and had long ago arrived at the state of mind where nothing his employer might say or do could surprise him.

"Looks like it was going to be quite a show here," he observed, turning the order slips over languidly.

"It is," Chance replied cheerfully. "Oh, by the way, Frank, I'll give you a blanket order to rush everything."

The purchasing agent nodded, and left the room. But before driving back to the siding he poked his head in at Baumann's door.

"Know of any Morris in the chair business, Henry?"

The draughtsman shook his head, and looked at the order. "It may be that he means William Morris," he observed.

“Who’s he?”

“He was an English writer, but I think he made some chairs.”

The purchasing agent turned the slip over in his hand and gazed at the back of it, while his other hand shoved his hat still farther to one side and absently rumpled his hair. Then, without further questioning, he left the room; and a moment later Baumann heard the scraping of the buggy wheel as he turned about in the narrow road and headed back to catch the night train South.

There was still an hour before the supper bell would ring, and Chance, laying his watch before him on the desk, settled down to think. Before he had dwelt very long on the Beechcroft proposition, his imagination had taken fire. It had puzzled him at first that a big, presumably sane Wall Street financier should ally himself with such a man as Stein, but he was now beginning to understand. As a proposition, the thing stirred him up, made his eyes dance. There were simply no limits to the potential profits in it. Beside it, the show business paled away, faded out. Where an amusement park would be lucky to get two dollars from a man, a Beechcroft could

take everything he had, sell him a tunic, and have his labor ever afterward for nothing. As for Stein, while probably the financier kept a pretty close eye on him, there was no board of auditors to poke around among his books, — there was no committee of stockholders to ask questions and get out injunctions. It was beautiful. Stein was welcome to the glory and the profits. All Chance asked was the opportunity to play that tremendous hand, and play it right. And that opportunity seemed now to be his.

He proposed to do it with something which would have the effect of a miracle, — the wonderful, glowing, uplifting picture of the new Beechcroft, built by inexperienced hands, the spontaneous flowering of the prophet's dream. Stein's attitude on the miracle question disturbed him not at all — that was where the beauties of human inconsistency entered in. He could trust Stein to deny blandly that the marvellous new Beechcroft was anything more than a working-out of the Beechcroft idea. The only danger lay in the possibility of some reporter finding out that it was John Chance, of Atlanta, and Omaha, and St. Louis, and Pittsburg, who was really rebuilding Beechcroft, and stumbling on a hint of

the fact that he had been hired to do it. That would blow up the miracle; it might even blow up Stein and Beauty through Toil. But that was the hazard of the game, and he accepted it with a chuckle. What made the whole thing really interesting, what gave it the twist he rather enjoyed, was that he had a very little over six weeks to do it in.

A large part of the construction work he would not begin at all until after the convention. But the temple and its adjoining buildings must go up; and, as they should rise above the foundations, the surrounding scaffolding would be enclosed in canvas until the morning of June tenth, when the picture would be unveiled. All this would be the more easy of accomplishment because the dwellings and shops of the older settlement lay farther down the valley, where the slopes were not so rugged. It was the narrow little bit at the head of the valley, where the cascades were, — hardly more than a quarter of a mile of it, — that Chance had chosen for practically all of his work. There was but one building here, a cottage that nestled among the foliage, and it would have to go. After supper, accordingly, carrying an unlighted square “art” lantern,

with a candle inside and holes punched through the sides, he swung off down the dusky wood road to see Hobbema about it.

Hobbema, the general overseer of Beechcroft life and activity, lived in a house which was second only to Stein's in size. Like all the structures in the valley, it was built and furnished along the lines which those persons who talk about "arts and crafts" call "artistic." The local intrigues had always been focussed on Hobbema, and in consequence he looked like a man who did not sleep well of nights.

Chance walked briskly down the valley road past the outlying cottage and the dark shops. He met one of Stein's "Beechcroft Guards," an alert country boy with well-knotted biceps and calves and with the blue band of authority over one shoulder, passed the time of night with him, then turned in at the house of the overseer. He swung the big brass knocker, and in a moment was ushered in by a soulful-eyed little maid, evidently one of those Beechcrofters who, in lieu of money, were giving domestic service. Hobbema would have liked to keep an English butler and a retinue of servants, like Stein. But that little inconsistency was permitted only to the

prophet. Chance walked into the long, low-ceiled living-room, and settled himself comfortably, knowing from a former experience or two that the overseer, being a small soul, would keep him waiting for a while; and finding a flabbily bound copy of Rossetti's poems at his elbow, he picked it up and skimmed the pages.

"Good evening, Comrade," said a thin voice; and he looked up to encounter the nervous, shifting eyes, and the narrow face and forehead of Samuel L. Hobbema, ex-preacher, ex-college professor, ex-lecturer, ex-real-estate broker, who was known in the Beechcroft vernacular as "Comrade Samuel." Neither he nor his wife ever addressed Chance by his full name, because they did not know it; indeed, their evident difficulty in placing him and his relations with the prophet was one of the humorous little facts that made the necessity of talking with them at all not unendurable to him.

The overseer was soon followed by his wife, who was taller than he, and certainly not younger.

"What can I do for you, Comrade?" asked Hobbema.

Chance settled back in the big Morris chair, and gave himself a moment for thought. He

would have to do business pretty steadily with the overseer for some time to come, and so he deliberately put by the desire he always felt, when he talked with him, to handle him brusquely. From the depths of the chair he spoke, unaware that he was exploding a bomb in the bosom of the Hobbema family.

“Who lives in that cottage in the upper valley?”

Both started perceptibly, and looked at him. Then Mrs. Hobbema fixed her eyes on her husband, and he stared out for a moment through the small-paned window into the twilight. And then, as the question was still resting unanswered on the air, the overseer turned and made an effort to overcome his embarrassment.

“You mean — ah —”

“Where the road turns,” said Chance.

Husband and wife looked at each other, the one furtive, the other stern.

“A young woman lives there,” said Hobbema. “She is known as “Comrade Ellen,” and he added, “she makes baskets.”

There certainly was nothing appalling in her occupation. Chance would have enjoyed a good laugh as he looked across at this singular pair,— the man so insignificant in his tunic, the woman

so large and forbidding in her severely chaste white robes. But since his interest ran no farther than the cottage in question, he went on to dispose of the business.

"I shall be sorry to inconvenience her, Mr. Hobbema, but our plans make it necessary to remove the building."

"To remove it!" both repeated. And the overseer added, awkwardly, "It was Mr. Stein's idea — putting it up there. I should not like to do anything so drastic without an order from him."

"You might wire him, if you prefer."

Again the overseer turned to his wife.

"I am perfectly willing to take the responsibility," Chance added, "if you will look after the young lady."

"She could be put in with the Weavers, Samuel," suggested Mrs. Hobbema, "while other arrangements were being made for her. I think they would take her for a few days if you explained it."

"Or we might take her in here, my dear."

"No, we might *not*!" came the uncompromising reply.

Chance's mild interest in the situation was dying out. "If you're willing, I'll move the

house down this way. I shall have to do something about it this week."

"Is it as urgent as that, Comrade?"

"It is."

"Then perhaps we had better walk up there now, and explain it to her." And with this, braving his wife's frown, the overseer went out into the hall and lighted his lantern.

When they were out on the road, and had turned up the valley, he went on to say:—

"This thing is a little awkward, coming up in just this way, Comrade. I am glad that you spoke to me about it. I think you understand that I am the man at the throttle here. All the business of Beechcroft passes through my hands. Mr. Stein talks everything over with me. He has to, as a matter of fact, if our work here is to go on at all. But—of course, if you feel sure that your authority as the master builder permits you to do this, I will step aside in the matter. We must not have any conflict of authority, Comrade, in the absence of our leader."

He looked up out of the sides of his eyes. He was wondering how much Chance could be led to tell about himself and his singular position at Beechcroft. As overseer, he alone knew how

singular that position was. And he knew too many of Stein's secrets to remain for long comfortably ignorant concerning the details of this one. It was clear enough to him that the master builder was not a regular devotee. But, on the other hand, he had so far discovered no record of payments made to him.

"I suppose you are informed," he ventured, "about the great work Mr. Stein is developing at New York?"

"I'm afraid I am not."

"He expects very soon to announce a splendid addition to the "Triumph" movement, Comrade, — something which will give a new impetus to the work. Of course it is not announced yet, — it is confidential, you understand, — but he expects to bring a woman who is very young and very beautiful. If she comes, she will study here with the purpose of carrying Mr. Stein's truth to the country — to the world. She will be our Joan of Arc, rousing the country to enthusiasm. There seems to be little danger of a slip now. The new convert, the famous Mr. Pole, has been a great help to him. I cannot say more than that he is anxious that our new Beechcroft shall make the most striking im-

pression on the tenth of June, when he brings his party up from town."

Chance smiled a little, and looked off up the starlit valley. He saw it, not as it was, but as it was to be when he should be through with it. It would fetch them — he knew it. The mark he had set himself was to make old Stein himself gasp — nothing less — when his eyes should first rest on the completed picture. The only thing that could spoil that wonderful first impression would be clouds, or a fog. All he asked was sunshine. He would provide everything else.

"The movement is bound to be a triumph indeed, Comrade," the overseer was saying at his elbow. "We are destined to sweep this broad land, to throw the light of truth into every dark corner. What are the roots of unhappiness, Comrade? Are they not idleness and luxury? It is only by ceaseless toil that we may build the beautiful, that we may achieve character. It is only by achieving character that we may be happy, that we may know the perfect peace of mind. It is all so simple, so easy to grasp, Comrade. Think what it will mean when, instead of a paltry quarter of a million believers, we shall have a million, five millions, ten millions! Think what it will mean to this nation!"

They were passing through the narrowest part of the valley, where there was room for little more than the stream and the road. With a brief "I beg your pardon," Chance stopped short, held his lantern aloft, and scrutinized the steep walls on either side, where the bare, wet rock of the mountain side, cropping out here and there through the thin covering of soil and brush, threw back the shine of his lantern. He caught at a sapling and swung himself down to the stream, looking closely at the shelving banks, and taking rough measurements with his eye. It would be easier than he had supposed; absurdly easy, considering the remarkable result to be obtained. Then, with a little nod of satisfaction, he scrambled back to the road.

"All right, Comrade Samuel," he said cheerfully. "Here's the house, just ahead of us." As they walked briskly on, he added, "By the way, I shall have to change the road all round, where it passes through the notch here."

Hobbema knocked and then entered. The door gave directly into the living-room which, with its flat wall surface, its green-stained beams overhead, and its absence of any but the simplest ornaments, was very restful. What caught the

eye at once in a manner to disturb somewhat this harmony of outline, were the long rows of baskets, of all sizes and colors and shapes, that stood along the walls, and the heaps of baskets in the farther corners. After the one sweeping glance about the room, Chance found his eye drawn to the young woman who was putting by an unfinished basket, with streamers of colored raffia trailing from it, and rising to meet them. Her robes were not white, like those of most of the other Beechcroft women, but yellow — a yellow that was almost green in the lamplight. She was tall, and so slender that she seemed to sway as she walked, or glided, toward them. She was not beautiful, — so much Chance decided at once, — but there was about her a curious sort of distinction. Her face was long and almost angular, set off severely by the straight, parted hair. Her eyes were large and dark, and seemed at one moment lustrous, at another clouded. But her hands were her most striking feature — long and slender, with tapering, restless fingers.

She merely inclined her head toward the overseer. Her eyes were fixed on Chance in a way that made him a little uncomfortable. She laid her hand in his, looking steadily into his eyes,

and said, in a voice of some natural depth and freshness, but expressionless:—

“You are Comrade John, the builder. I am glad you have come here. I think we shall be friends.”

They seated themselves beneath the tall, green-shaded lamp, and she resumed her work on the basket.

“You have come to tell me something,” she said, speaking directly to Chance.

“Comrade John has a — a matter to discuss with you,” began the overseer; but she interrupted him, positively, but without emotion.

“Then let him speak to me,” she said.

There was something attractive about her in spite of her strange ways, something which Chance felt to be utter, uncompromising honesty. He looked at her for a moment and then said, with a touch of deference in his voice:—

“The subject will not be pleasant for you, Comrade Ellen.” The words seemed a natural enough mode of address, as they fell from his lips. “It will be necessary to move this house into the lower valley.”

She lowered her work and looked at him. “Why?” she asked.

"Because, I am very sorry to say, it is in the way of our work here."

There was a long silence, while she read the face of the master builder. Then she slowly turned to the overseer.

"You would not have brought him to me with this news a year ago — before Herman Stein — before —"

She did not finish. Hobbema's narrow face grew slowly red. His eyes shifted about, and finally fixed themselves on the half-formed basket in her lap. And Chance, as he looked, first at the flushing charlatan, then at the fearless, misguided, terribly lonely young woman, who, whatever she might be, had at least the courage of the child and the simpleton, the courage which drags out that which cowardice would conceal, began to understand this singular situation; and he forgot even his contempt for the man in his great pity for the woman. So this was the trail of Stein! So Beechcroft was not a joke!

"Well," she said, "is that all?"

Chance bowed.

"Then I suppose there is nothing more to be said?"

Chance arose; and then, as the overseer moved toward the door, he turned and extended his hand. He met her gaze unflinchingly, and without lowering his hand. Finally she took it.

"I am sorry," he said. "I did not know how much it might mean. I did not even know whom I should be disturbing. I am — sorry."

"It marks the end," she replied, in the same low, expressionless voice. And then, evidently moved by a swift impulse, she added, so low that the overseer could not hear, "Come back — in twenty minutes."

He bowed and walked away. And a moment later he was saying good night to Hobbema, out in the road.

"I have been thinking, Comrade," said the overseer, with a glance toward the house, which looked very snug in its setting of vines and shrubbery, all a-rustle in the night breeze, "I've been thinking that perhaps it would be better if you understood —"

"Good night," Chance broke in. And he walked rapidly away, up the dim road.

That something which had been aroused within him had not wholly quieted down when he returned a quarter of an hour later. She was

standing in the open doorway looking off into the night.

"Come here," she said, leading him in behind the vine that screened the veranda, and deliberately placing him where the soft interior light fell on him; "I don't know who you are — you whom they call 'Comrade John.' But I know that you do not belong at Beechcroft. Men with eyes like yours do not come here. Women come here, and fools. Tell me — why are you here?"

Chance deliberated a moment.

"You have asked me a question which I would not answer without thought," he said. "I am not sure that I would answer it at all. Would it be fair, after saying that, to ask you a very similar question?"

"From you it would," she replied slowly. "I was one of the fools."

"Why do you stay?"

"There is no other place for me."

Suddenly her eyes flashed.

"What have they told you about me?" she demanded. "What do they say about me?"

And as suddenly she spared him a reply. "I don't know why I asked you to come back," she said "— unless it was your eyes. Perhaps —

some day — you may be able to help me. You will, I think, if you can. Possibly, even, I may be able to help you.”

“Yes,” he replied, looking at her with frank, grave interest. “It may be.” And all the way up the dark mountain road this new gravity hung over him.

. . . . .

Henry and Bill were playing pinochle in the model room. Chance nodded in through the doorway and passed on into the little room in which he slept. There were a good many fools in the world, and he had never felt much personal responsibility for them. Plenty were drawn under in the show business — feeble little moths, attracted by the glitter and the sparkle, burning their wings and dropping from sight. But if the show business could not be made fool-proof, still it stood forth frankly for what it was, and you could take it or leave it.

The Beechcroft proposition would probably be well enough, in supplying the popular demand, if always some hardworking, inconspicuous manager stood by to see that none of the fools were hurt on the chutes or ground up on the scenic railway. But to lure in the deluded ones and

wreck them — that was different. If that was the game, somebody, some day, would have to pay the shot. He felt no more responsibility for Stein than a lawyer or an architect feels for his client. But Stein had a job on his hands, and if he failed to mind it he would undoubtedly have to pay the shot. And if, or when, that payment should fall due, the resulting spectacle would probably be worth seeing.

## CHAPTER V

### THE PERSON WHO GASPED

DURING the first few weeks Chance permitted some of the disciples to mingle with his workmen, in order to support the illusion of what he felt inclined to term "Beauty through incompetence." But on the first of May he washed his hands of Beechcroft labor. He was keyed up to a big job, and he refused to be hampered by incompetents. He had no time for playing a part. At any moment he was likely to crash through all restraints, and come out with sharp, driving orders. Then, the incompetents were a drag on his real workmen. It is a nerve-racking experience to keep several hundred men up to top pitch for six weeks; once you lose the pace you cannot regain it. So he asked Hobbema to place guards where they could keep every one from Beechcroft out of the upper valley. And then rapidly the oddly shaped canvas enclosures mounted upward. Hammers and sledges rang

all day, and, as soon as the electrical connection was established, all night. Two hoisting engines puffed and rumbled unceasingly. Long strings of wagons crawled, creaking, down the upper road and back again. Tunics and sandals were discarded for overalls and boots. Men swarmed down into the narrow valley, felling trees and clearing out underbrush. A steam roller came up from New York, puffed, clanked, and groaned its way through the settlement, and went heavily to work on the elliptical promenade for which Chance had imported crushed limestone, at considerable expense, in place of the dark native bluestone. He wished that promenade to be white.

May ran on into June. The days grew warmer, and there was real sweat at Beechcroft, plenty of it. One Saturday night some West Street whiskey found its way into camp, and Chance and Hemenway and a sturdy foreman or two fought and bullied and cajoled twenty-odd riotous, wood-alcohol-crazy laborers out of a raid on the peaceful settlement in the lower valley, which was sleeping softly amid its green trees and by its bubbling, swirling little stream. By way of result, one man went down to New York in the baggage car with a broken jaw, and

neither Chance nor Bill Hemenway was presentable for a day or so.

The eighth of June dawned clear and warm, and Chance, fresh from camp cot and tin bathtub, clad in conventional city costume, was up almost with the sun. This day he planned to spend in New York, — telegrams to that effect had gone down the day before, — but before evening he would be back, keen, vigorous, ready for the lively forty-eight hours ahead of him. There had been no allowance for mistakes or accidents. Before noon, two days later, Stein and his Joan would be on the ground. The convention would be in session, with delegations from every state and territory, and even from the foreign countries. An earnest little band of Japanese disciples had already arrived at Broadrib's Station. There could be no doubt that Stein was a great press agent, — he possessed the subtle art of "bringing the people out." And now it rested with John Chance (in his own phrase) "to deliver the show." But first he proposed to play the press agent himself. Stein had never yet drawn any but derisive comment from the New York papers. Now it was a part of Chance's plan that a full force of reporters should be in

his audience on that tenth of June, to see for themselves the triumph of blended incompetence and faith, and that they should come not in jibing mood. Accordingly, after a light breakfast, a pipe, and a last word with his foremen, he sprang into his buggy, drove up through the notch and down the winding road to the siding, and caught the seven-twenty-two train for New York.

. When he walked through the ramshackle, ill-smelling ferry house at Forty-second Street and caught the blend of familiar odors and the warm, humid air which are New York in summer, he became sharply conscious of the fact that he must not be recognized. It would be difficult to answer certain questions that would be asked. He had almost forgotten that part of his contract. After all, he had allowed himself to be drawn in as a party to a fraud of some magnitude, and it was with a half-conscious little shrug that he realized that he was committed to seeing it through. A casual paragraph in one of the evening papers, to the effect that John Chance, the showman and architect, was the real brain behind the spontaneous flowering of Herman Stein's prophetic spirit, might easily wreck the

prophet's career and bring his elaborate structure tumbling down around him.

The first object that caught his eye was his own big limousine Panhard waiting just outside the wagon shed, the chauffeur scanning closely the crowd of country folk which was streaming through the gates. With an impatient gesture, Chance stepped out of the crowd and in among the wagons on the roadway. He was beside the car before the chauffeur saw him.

"Don't look at me, Claude," he said, "don't speak to me. Get out of here, and stay away. I'm in Paris — understand!"

A few steps more, and he had disappeared within a four-wheeler cab, and was rattling eastward over the broken, bumpy pavement of Forty-second Street. As he passed the stage door of Hammerstein's Victoria Theatre he leaned far back in the cab. This was the showman's quarter of New York, and there was a greater possibility than he liked to think about of his being recognized. The driver turned down Broadway, and pulled up before a building which, judging from the gilt legends on every window, was given over to the managers of show and theatrical enterprises. Chance entered the build-

ing, mounted one flight of stairs, and opened a rear door which bore the words, "Office of John Chance — Skelton H. Dunning, Press Representative."

"Good morning, Skip," he said, with a nod.

"Hello, Mr. Chance." The tall, humorously cynical, very dressy young man, who had been tipped back in a swivel chair, feet on desk, exchanging banter with a pretty stenographer, brought down his feet with a bang, and pushed his Panama hat still farther back on his head as a preliminary to shaking hands. "I got your message all right. Did Claude meet you?"

"He came altogether too near it," Chance replied dryly. "Don't do that again, Skip." He observed his telegram of a day before lying open on a conspicuous corner of the desk, and reaching over, he carefully tore it up, and threw it into the waste-basket. Then he passed on into the inner office, followed by the press representative.

"Sit down, Skip. Now, suppose we take a good look at each other. Do you see me?"

"I'm afraid I do. You haven't put me wise."

"No, you don't see me. I'm in Paris."

"All right. I'm next. Just a few lines — say a stickful — in the gossip column — *Evening Globe, Telegram* —"

"No, Skip. Not a stickful anywhere."

"I see. Nothing doing. Haven't heard from you lately — motoring in the Riviera, maybe."

"You'd better try saying nothing at all. Now take a look at this." And handing over a big envelope full of typewritten manuscript, Chance turned to the accumulation of papers on his desk.

Dunning read rapidly, letting his trained eye run from paragraph to paragraph. Finally he looked up with a low whistle. "It's beautiful, Mr. Chance — beautiful."

"Now I'll tell you what I want you to do, Skip. First go over the thing, and make it read right. See that the miracle part of it, the idea of those imbeciles," — he smiled, — "Bill calls them the near-toilers, working out Stein's visions in the real wood and stone, and actually making it the most beautiful spot in the world, — see that it is played up for all it will stand. Work out more fully the admission that they haven't pretended to do the rougher part of the labor themselves. And put in some humor scattered along through it. Guy the whole show a little to make it interesting."

"Sure — sure."

"Get the stuff ready to-night."

"And let one of the newspaper boys have it?"

"That is where you do a little work, Skip. Nobody is to know that it comes from us. We've got to get the newspaper boys up there on the tenth, but we can't ask them to come. If we did, — or worse, if Stein did it personally, — every paper would send up its humorist. I want this thing handled as *news*. It will show them that something is really doing at Beechcroft — something they can't afford to miss. They won't see me, — I'll be well out of the way, — but they'll see Stein and Stein's miracle; and miracles are fairly scarce these days. Get it into to-morrow's *World*, if you can, or the *Herald*. There are pictures of Stein and Hobbema in that envelope, and a group of the women in costume, and another group of the Beechcroft guards."

Dunning looked down at the photographs, then up at his employer, and his face expanded in a sly, slow grin. "Pretty good graft this man Stein is working up," he observed.

"Pretty good," Chance replied.

"The only outfit he seems to need is a straight face and a place to put the money."

"That's about all."

The press representative mused. "I know him," he said. "He used to lecture on soul culture to suburban ladies." His eyes strayed back to the photographs, and again came that slow grin. "But this proposition has the lecture graft skinned alive."

"You'd better get at it, Skip," said Chance, who was back in his correspondence. "And remember, the thing must be air-tight — no leaks in it — not a suspicion that the story comes from the inside."

"All right, Mr. Chance. I know a little girl who won't be sorry to sell the *World* a choice special story on her own account. We'll make little old New York sit up and take a long look around." He rose, gathering up the manuscript and the pictures. "The Beechcroft miracle will leave the Elijah invasion mired at the quarter pole. Peace be with thee!" And with this mildly ribald comment, the press representative withdrew to the outer office and set to work.

Chance left New York as cautiously as he had entered it, and at four o'clock was back at his desk in the model room, putting the details of his correspondence in such shape that his

stenographer would be able to handle it for a few days. At five he slipped into his Beechcroft dress and went down to "the job."

Bill Hemenway was ready in the gorge with a dozen carpenters and fifty to sixty laborers. Another gang of laborers was waiting by the heaps of broken stone on the hillside. Chance clambered up beside them and ran an observant eye over the coils of cable, the running tackle, and the lines of buckets ready filled with stone. He scrambled down and glanced at the timber piles, then walked over to the waiting superintendent.

"All right, Bill," he said. "Go ahead."

At this the superintendent waved his hands, and a dozen men, with double timber hooks, picked up one of the big timbers and staggered with it down the slope, across the clear, shallow stream, and over to the blue-stone abutment on the farther side. Another stick followed, and another, until the rocky ground, ready levelled for the purpose, was floored for twenty feet on either side of the water. The men on the hillside were at work uncoiling wire cables and running them down through the underbrush, across the gorge, and up the farther bank. As soon as

the dusk had fairly begun to settle down, Chance gave another order, and the cables were hauled up taut in the air, from hillside to hillside. A few moments more, and a timber hoist slowly lifted its head above the trees and settled into place. It was all accomplished as nearly silently as possible. Chance and Hemenway gave their orders in low tones, and McCune, the Irish foreman, on the hillside, restrained his tongue valiantly, swearing in so soft a voice that it came down to the ears of the men below only as a low, almost continuous murmur.

It was a bright evening, and with the help of a few well-placed gasoline flares, — a relic, like the canvas about the buildings, of the late lamented Coyote Bill, — the men were able to place the upright timbers. Then, at the wave of a lantern, the first bucket of stone came careering down the cable, paused in mid-air, and let fall its burden on the timber flooring. Chance was satisfied now that the work would go on properly under the eye and hand of Bill Hemenway, and he walked up the promenade to the temple.

It was certainly not a typical Beechcroft scene, — this narrow gorge littered with building

materials, swarming with the gnome-like figures of half-clad, grunting men, the whole lighted with flares that wavered and flickered and kept the shadows dancing—but it would soon be over with. Within less than two days the gloomy ravine would smile.

About the temple and its adjoining buildings there was still the scaffolding and the dingy, loosely hung canvas. The painters were at work here and there, but already the work of taking down the scaffolding had begun. He entered the temple, from which all the interior scaffolding had been removed. It was cool and lofty in here, and he took off his hat, smiling a little as he did so, and seated himself for a breath and a look around. It was impressive, even to this man who had designed and built it, and who knew, what others would not know, that the walls were merely old boards, covered on the outside with sheet-iron and on the inside with lath and plaster. He looked up, in the faint, mysterious half light thrown in by the arc lamps outside the windows, at the speaker's platform with its quaint old mission pulpit, and nodded with satisfaction. What a setting it would make for the massive figure of Herman Stein!

After a moment he rose, mounted the platform, and passed on through the curtained doorway at the rear of the stage into the robing-room. Back of the robing-room was another, larger room, which he entered by unlocking a heavy oaken door with a flat key. He groped along the wall near the door, and by clicking a switch turned on a drop-light at the farther end of the room. There were big leather chairs here, and a long centre-table, and a roll-top mahogany desk, and a steel safe bearing the initials, "H. S." There were no windows. This room, this inner retreat, was the only thing Stein had expressly demanded. The walls, floor, and ceiling were of steel, faced with oak and plaster. Chance took it that Stein wished a burglar-proof room, secure against even the prying eyes of Hobbema, for his personal documents, and perhaps for his personal profits, and the desire seemed rational enough. "You never can tell," Chance reflected, as he looked about him, "how soon unexpected events will turn a peaceful community into a riotous mob." There was but the one door, and this, like the walls, was of steel sheathed with oak. The telephone was here, for during the construction period Chance was using the room

as an office. In addition to the camp connection, he had run a wire to Hobbema's house.

The temple, at least in the interior, was as impressive as Chance could wish. If the exterior proved, in its green setting, as nearly like the dream that had for months filled his mind, there could be no doubt about the success of the new Beechcroft.

Even the old Beechcroft was apparently interesting to the convention visitors, who, during all of June ninth, came pouring in by every train, filling the hotels at Broadrib's Station, the boarding-houses along the road, and the dormitory tents which Hobbema was putting up in the clearings between Beechcroft and the Kinderkill. They swarmed up the valley, women with earnest eyes and children who asked questions. They peered into the shops, and grouped themselves before the house of the prophet. They picked leaves and wild flowers to press between the pages of "Toil and Triumph." Before noon of June tenth, the opening day, the pink-and-white mountain laurel, which had peeped out everywhere a few days earlier, through the hillside trees, had all but disappeared. The guards at the gorge, doubled in number, were already

yielding momentarily to outbursts of impatience with the wandering, pressing crowds that tried endlessly to circumvent them and have a look at that mysterious upper valley.

At noon of the great day Chance stood at the lower end of the promenade, just above the dam, and surveyed his work, and his pulses quickened a little as his eyes took it in. The picture was perfect — he knew that, as the artist always knows when his eye and hand have played him true. Stein would gasp. Chance was sure of it. He had set his stage with the greatest care. Below the dam the promenade descended on both sides of the stream in broad flights of stone steps to the ends of the valley road, which he had here depressed to a lower level.

Bill Hemenway, clad like Chance, in his tunic, came up the steps behind him.

“Well, Mr. Chance, how does she strike you, now she’s done?”

“First-rate, Bill.”

Bill stopped beside him and indulged in a long, sweeping look around. “It’s the first time I’ve really stopped to take it in myself, Mr. Chance. There’s no doubt you’ve got ’em. It’s the goods.” He yawned, and stretched his bare, wiry arms.

"If I loaf around here much longer, I'll be getting the Steineetis too, like them victims of the hook worm, down yonder. I guess they can manage to pull off their circus parade without my assistance. I'm going to tumble in and sleep till half-past ten to-morrow morning. Are you coming up to the shack?"

"Not just yet, Bill. Don't wait for me."

"Going to take in the show, eh? It's certainly a big day for Beechcroft. There's thousands of 'em waiting around down there. And I heard the new boy choir practising when I come by the old chapel. They were singing 'Soldiers of Toil, Arise, Arise,' and the one about Character and Beauty. Well, it's Morphee-us and the downy cot for mine."

And with this, Bill went up on the promenade, leaving his employer still gazing at the white temple against the green mountain side.

A little later Chance looked around toward the lower valley, and for the first time became conscious of the stir and activity there. He heard the confused murmur of many voices, the shouts and cries of children playing, the whinnying and stamping of horses. During these busy days and nights the world had doubtless been moving

along as usual. It was evident that the little Beechcroft world had been moving pretty rapidly. He had known that the temple was to be dedicated to the cause, and that there would be some display and ceremony, but the work at his hand had lately been so engrossing as to drive everything else out of his mind. Now, as he looked down through the foliage, and caught glimpses of the throngs of eager men and women there, and of banded Beechcroft guards, with their long staves, moving about and pressing them back, he realized what was going on. For Herman Stein was no fool; and this was the moment in which Herman Stein must play up the Beechcroft miracle for all it was worth. Stein had been working, that was plain. And Hobbema had been working. And neither had taken John Chance into his confidence. Chance had constructed and delivered the miracle, as per agreement. And this done, also as per agreement, Chance dropped out of the picture. The toil had been for Chance; the triumph was now for Stein.

Stein and that mysterious party of his must have arrived at Beechcroft some little time earlier; Chance recalled that he had heard the whistle

of the Beechcroft Special long before noon, and it was now a little after. But Stein would play it deliberately — trust him for that! And he would dress the part — how he *would* dress it! Well, this place here, at the top of the steps, and off to one side, would be as good as any from which to see the show. It commanded the steps, as well as the upper valley, and a little of the roadway at the bottom. The rest of the roadway and most of the lower valley was hidden behind the closely interlacing foliage. Yes, here he would stand, an inconspicuous figure, and watch another take the credit for what he had done. It would be a new, a not uninteresting sensation for John Chance.

Above the confusion of sound, and nearer at hand, he heard the tramp of marching feet, and then a high-pitched order. Hobbema came into view, bearing his staff of office, with the blue-and-gold knob at the top of it. There was always something a bit ridiculous about Hobbema in full regalia. After him, marching two and two, blue-knobbed staves on shoulders, came twenty of the Beechcroft guards. Hobbema gave another order. The guards fell into line across the road, just below the steps, and the crowd swarmed

over the road and pressed up close. Chance heard another sharp voice, a little farther off, and through the leaves he could just make out that a smaller squad of guards had taken a similar position at the steps on the other side of the stream. Hobbema must have drilled a special force for the occasion. Four trumpeters, in white tunics with red girdles, red caps, and red cross-garters, mounted the steps and took position directly across the promenade.

Chance allowed himself a momentary smile. The stage management was excellent. He looked down the steps and bowed slightly in mock congratulation toward the back of Hobbema's head. But Hobbema could never have got it up alone. Behind Hobbema was Stein, — Stein the prophet, Stein the showman, — and for him, by way of his overseer, that mocking little bow was intended.

There was a hush. The crowd at the foot of the steps was falling away to the sides of the road, and leaning out to peer down the valley. The guards broke ranks and came running up the steps, forming in two lines from top to bottom, with the width of the stairway between them. The four trumpeters, who had been lounging on the hillside, straightened up and began looking

to their instruments and watching Hobbema for their signal.

The hush deepened. The only noise, for a moment, was the gentle music of the brook. Then softly through the foliage, some little way off, came a burst of melody from the throats of two score boy and men singers. And never did boy voices sound clearer and purer than on this still afternoon. Chance felt it. He forgot to think of the stage management. Something of the almost religious awe which had settled over the throng of people along the road and on the hillsides touched even the sceptical young showman who had made this day possible, this day of Stein's triumph. The processional swelled louder. If he could have caught the words, their pathetically unconscious humor would have upset his gravity. But he had never opened Stein's hymnal; and now he could hear only the music of the fresh young voices.

Two women and a man were slowly coming up the stairway. Chance saw Hobbema bow very respectfully, and then his eye rested on the little party. His wits had gone wool-gathering, and the newcomers were halfway up the steps before his eyes really took them in.

The man he recognized, after a slight sense of surprise and a momentary searching of his memory, for Moberly Pole, the painter. The surprise was occasioned by Pole's costume, for the man was a Beechcrofter from the sole of his sandaled foot to the crown of his bare head. The older of the two women also wore the Beechcroft dress. It was not very becoming to her; and there was something dispirited, something more of toil than of triumph, in the way she was ascending the steps. The younger woman alone still wore the dress of the outer world. Either she had not surrendered to Stein and Beechcroft, or she had too keen a sense of her beauty to swathe herself in shapeless draperies like those of her companion. She was beautiful; Chance knew that, even though her hat hid her face, from the movements of her lithe young body and from the poise of her shapely head and the straying locks of her hair. But it was not her beauty that now puzzled him, that suddenly roused his jaded faculties and straightened up his lounging figure, — he was standing very straight, one hand gripping the stone post at the end of the dam, — it was something else. He knew her, he was sure — almost sure. A slight, hardly distin-

guishable flush spread across his forehead. Then she looked up. She glanced at him as if he had been a guard or a trumpeter or a tree. Then, a puzzled question in her eyes, she looked again. He knew her now; and with an expression that lay midway between bewilderment and dismay, he turned his gaze from her to the picture at the head of the valley and back again. And the voices of the boy singers, now only a little way down the road, soared in clear, careless triumph; it seemed as if they might be singing to her.

There she stood on the top step, motionless, gazing at the picture before her. Her face, too, was flushed. Her eyes grew moist. She caught her breath and then almost smiled. She was radiant; she was the cathedral candle he had seen on the day of carnival. And he, when he had looked at her, standing unconscious there, until his dismay had conquered his bewilderment, turned his eyes again to the picture which he had created, and which she was now the first to see.

The semicircle of red-roofed, white-walled buildings, at the head of the little valley, leading up from either side to the temple, still caught the morning sun on their flat surfaces and threw

it back with a brilliancy that was dazzling to the eyes. The temple itself, placed high up on the slope at the top of a great flight of white steps, reared its towers far above the idealized workshops at its base with a triumphant, exulting lightness and strength in every outline. Towers, we have called them, but that is not the word. They were nearer minarets, but without the fantastic elaboration. In Chance's thoughts they had always been a cluster of great cathedral candles. That was what he had worked out, — he had caught himself working it out; and it had seemed humorous at first, — the feeling that the *Mardi Gras* girl, the girl who was searching with questioning eyes for that looking-glass country which she would never find in this world, the feeling that she had aroused in him when he first saw her with Tommy Hollister on the boulevard. And so they were not exactly towers, they were not exactly minarets, they were not exactly spires; they were the expression, in terms of architecture, of a sensation he had once experienced. Out of the centre of the cluster rose one larger than the others, which was capped with burnished bronze. That bronze, shining in the sunlight, was her hair.

Back of the buildings, of the temple, of the cathedral candles, was the velvety green slope of Mt. William; above them was the clear blue-and-white sky. But the lake was the master-stroke, the mirror with which he had floored the valley. The swans were swimming there. A solitary blue heron stood on one leg, shank-deep in the shallows, and gazed mournfully about him. The gondola, the single black note in the picture, gathering to itself all the shadows, was drifting lazily about near the upper end, the white-clad gondolier leaning on his oar. The stream had been diverted into a conduit through the basement of the temple, and it came shimmering down the central flight of steps, within two low stone barriers, and leaped off a sheer thirty feet, half losing itself in mist before it reached the water below. And every detail of the picture — sky, mountain, temple, gondola, swans — was reflected in the mirror. The gentle ripples from the waterfall, and the occasional slow movements of the gondolier's oar did not break the reflection; but they stirred the clear outlines, and set the broad patches of red and green and blue and white to over-lapping and mixing in little waves of gay color.

There was a stir behind him at the foot of the steps. He half turned; and then he saw that the little party had moved over to his side of the promenade. Pole and the older woman were peering down through the foliage; but the girl was looking at him, bewildered, almost timid, a look of recognition hovering about her eyes, ready, at a sign, to break into a smile. He smiled, not quite the easy, honest smile which had stayed in her memory, but something very near it; and then she was certain. She came straight to him, knowing no more than he what to say, but so glad to see him that she grew suddenly self-conscious, and extended her hand.

“You didn’t tell me —” her voice was low, and not quite firm.

“How could I? I did not know —”

She looked up at him, and her eyes filled again, and a little wave of color came into her face. “I can’t talk now,” she said. “It is so beautiful — so wonderful — and Mr. Stein will be here in a moment. But now I know — you are here — and —” Then she made an effort to draw herself together, and looked up again. Her voice trembled, but her eyes were smiling. “You

have settled it for me again, Monsieur — Jean. I will stay here. I have found my job.”

The trumpets blared out. The choir ascended the steps and passed out, two and two, along the promenade, their pale yellow stoles over the white surplices adding a new note to the color harmony. The guards followed, and took up a position in advance of the choir. Then a solitary, massive figure appeared at the foot of the steps and slowly mounted. The squarely outlined head was bare. Over the white tunic, gathered at the left shoulder and falling in broad folds over the massive frame, he wore a white toga, bordered at the hem with a wide band of royal purple. And set in the purple hem, at short intervals, were golden stars. The leader, the master, spoke in every line of that solid figure. Stein was playing it up.

At the top step the prophet stopped short. The poise, the wonderful self-control on which he prided himself, fell suddenly away from him. He drew in a long breath — and looked. And then, like the orator who turns a mishap into a deliberate effect, he raised his hand, and the trumpeters stopped, and the people were silent. A moment passed; then Stein, himself again,

walked deliberately forward. And now in his face, in his carriage, even in his back as he moved away, there was evident a supreme, a perfect satisfaction. This was his great moment. His visions had flowered. He was the master builder, the creator of all that lay before his eyes — of the solid, the serene, the beautiful, the aspiring, the triumphant Beechcroft-to-be.

"Pardon me, Miss Cynthia — I think we had better go." It was Moberly Pole, speaking in his high, melodious voice. "Mr. Stein has arranged for you to sit near the platform."

Chance started a little, and tightened his hold on the hand that was still resting in his, — not until this moment had he been conscious that it was still there, — and looked at Cynthia with an involuntary drawing together of his brows. For she, still with that rapt, radiant expression about her eyes, was gazing after the prophet.

"I think we had better go, Miss Cynthia," Pole repeated.

Chance leaned forward, drawing her, at the same time, a little nearer to him. He could not bear to see those questioning, luminous, innocent eyes fixed on Herman Stein. He was on the point of telling her, brutally, that she had made a

mistake, that this, again, was far, far removed from the looking-glass country of her dreams. He did not care if Pole heard him — he did not care who heard him — he did not care if Beechcroft went to smash. But he did not tell her. Instead, he said, in a quick, low voice, "We will see each other again. I want to talk with you."

She inclined her head dreamily; and he released her hand and looked after her as she walked slowly toward the temple, beside the procession. The choir, at the head, was singing again, and the trumpeters were playing the melody. The toilers, each guild wearing its color, and bearing its implements, were filing by, bright-eyed, light-hearted, buoyed up by the exhilarating brilliancy of the day, by the magic of the picture, by the splendor of the prophet and his works. The printers, in russet brown, carried composing sticks in their right hands. The weavers, in dull green, carried bobbins. The furniture-makers wore Indian-red, and carried hammers. And after these duller notes, the silver-workers, in white, with silver embroidery, and a little band of artists in crimson, added gayety and charm to a color-scheme that might otherwise have appeared sombre.

Chance, still frowning a little, was absently watching the various guilds pass by, when he became conscious that a man was working his way down the hillside through the trees and the undergrowth. He raised his eyes. After a moment the man emerged on a projecting rock and took a long look around. And Chance, when he had made him out, paused not at all to collect his thoughts, but turned and ran down the steps, past the marching toilers and through the crowd. For the man was Jimmy Heath, occasional Washington correspondent and leading reporter of the *New York World*.

Chance crossed the brook on the stepping-stones, picking his way through a group of wading children, who knew little of the comedy, with its half-hidden suggestion of a tragic dénouement, which was being enacted all about them. The crowds were streaming up the steps on the farther side, and through them Chance forced his way. He crossed the road, plunged into the bushes, and climbed, by a path he knew, to an old wood road which circled around the hillside behind the temple to the upper camp. The view was shut off by the dense foliage, but after a little he came to an open spot and paused to look out and down.

The masses of color were now extended the entire length of the promenade. The trumpeters and the choir were standing before the temple doors, at the top of the cascade. Their music rang out triumphantly through the valley, and a hundred little echoes rebounded from hillside to hillside, from rock to rock. A solitary figure, in white and purple, was ascending the long flight of white steps, very deliberately. And at the foot of the steps, just above the mist of the cascade, stood a small group, one of whom, a slender young woman, wore the costume of the outer world.

Chance turned and moved on through the shadowy, sunflecked forest. The wood-thrushes sang as he walked rapidly, heedlessly along. The chipmunks looked out from the rocks and chattered angrily at him. A porcupine lumbered out of the path in fright and hid his head under a log until the danger was past. But Chance was blind to-day to the myriad life of the mountain side. He was wondering if Allah was turning another job over to him, a job singularly like, in certain particulars, the one he had undertaken in Paris a few months ago. If so, it would be less simple to manage. For this time he was

not a disinterested spectator. This time he could hardly play the care-free young god out of the machine. This time he was one of the crowd from Julian's.

## CHAPTER VI

### GODDESS EXCELLENTLY BRIGHT

Not until his next cautious visit to New York, a day or two after the close of the convention, did John Chance realize how completely his Beechcroft "miracle" had fulfilled its purpose. The tide of visitors which flowed and ebbed every day between Broadrib Station and the new Mecca, and never gave the dust a chance to settle between the hours of the first train from town and the last train back, was after all only an insignificant manifestation of a curiosity which was stirring all the country. It was a curiosity of different sorts, to be sure; reverent in some, coolly sceptical in others, impertinent in many more, but in one form or another it infected pretty much all the newspaper-reading public, east, west, south, everywhere.

The "Toilers" were triumphant. Of course they were satirized in "feature stories" and frivolous editorials of the metropolitan press.

The construction camp, for example, and the steam roller provided fuel for mirth. But this sort of painless martyrdom is just what a new religion thrives on. Even the threatened "exposure" of Stein in one of the ten-cent magazines would help. Anything that served to keep "Toil and Triumph" in the focus of the public eye, that prevented the wide-awake national curiosity from diverting itself with something else, was grist to the mill.

And there were indications, apparent to Chance's observant eye even in Beechcroft, that this curiosity, while it lasted, was to be worked for all it was worth. The huge hotel at Broadrib Station, rushing to completion as fast as the flimsiest construction would permit, and a second one out near the entrance to the lower valley, which was to be twice as expensive and only half as ugly, these hinted at it plainly enough. But down in New York were the mountains of "Toil and Triumph" which amazed the eye in all the book stores; it was the new edition, hot from the press in time for the convention, and changed just enough from the former one so that all the faithful would have to buy it; and it was half a dollar more expensive, too, for they were charg-

ing "what the traffic would bear" for it. There were jewellers' windows solid full of souvenir spoons bearing the Beechcroft stamp, and selling, on the strength of it, at a rate of about two dollars and a half an ounce. And these things told of a wider public.

The last thing Chance had noted before taking the new "Beechcroft Special" at Weehawken was the pyrographic and raffia-work outfits which he saw in one of Macy's windows, selling, by virtue of this same Beechcroft stamp on the box, for a good sixty per cent more than they were worth. The sight of them set Chance to wondering whether Stein's financial executive had taken the trouble to buy the output of the factory and put the label on, or whether he had adopted the simpler expedient of charging a royalty for the use of the precious stamp.

The fact that he did not know brought it home to him that he was not in Stein's confidence any further than his own part of the work took him, and that was less and less as he got on with it. The beautifully organized financial orbit of the game intersected his only at the point of his quarterly check for twelve thousand five hundred dollars. There was something ele-

mental about Stein, something as remorseless as the forces of nature. He absorbed everything about him that he could use, and the residuum he cast up in a sort of moraine along his trail. He gave nothing back; there were no tracks leading away from his den. Poor Burkett, if Chance could have introduced his evidence, Burkett, who had written "Toil and Triumph" at a weekly salary, might have expanded that thesis to formidable proportions.

But on the warm June afternoon when Chance climbed unobtrusively down from the Beechcroft Special at Excelsior Siding, he was in no mood to quarrel with anything, let alone his exclusion from the prophet's confidence and his inner councils. Having the boundaries of his job defined in this way, defined also his responsibility. He had agreed to "reconstruct Beechcroft to the satisfaction of Mr. Stein," and he was doing that amply. That the new religion was immensely profitable to Mr. Stein and to his financial backers, or that it was immensely unprofitable to Mr. Stein's disciples, was positively none of his business.

Anyway, they were having a good time, those disciples. They had nothing hard or disagree-

able to do, and one of the loveliest places in the world in which to do it. They were a lot better off, when all was said, with their bare legs and tunics, up in this sweet-smelling valley, than the sweaty, derby-hatted disciples of Mammon down town, and perhaps no worse deluded.

He took off his own hat and let the wind rumple his hair. Now that the back of his task was broken, he meant to enjoy taking things easy for a while. He was glad of an excuse for donning his tunic again and spending a few weeks more out in the tingling mountain air — glad that he was a Beechcrofter himself, temporarily.

But being a Beechcrofter, it seemed, had no charm for Bill Hemenway. Bill was waiting for him in a buggy at Excelsior Siding, cloaked in a black melancholy which seemed to deepen at Chance's smile, and on which the cheering effect of a big cigar was no more than momentary.

"Temple burned up?" Chance inquired ironically.

"No," said Bill, "everything's about as you left it, Mr. Chance. *Just* about."

Chance laughed. "Our imitation disciples haven't struck, have they? Against a six-hour day and full time for ten?"

"They might about as well, for all they're getting done. You can get about as much real work out of them as you could get out of a litter of yellow pups. We can't do nothing with them. What can we do, with all them Steinites mooning around all day, bringing them drinks from the spring and putting fool ideas into their thick heads? McCune goes around and swears at them nights, but it don't do no good on the job — if you call this a job. Everybody has got lazy but McCune and me, even Henry."

"Good for Henry," grinned Chance. "I feel lazy myself. But if you're feeling energetic, you can whip up this old plug of a horse. I want to get into my tunic again."

The play of the whip about the old horse's flanks was less perhaps to the purpose Chance suggested than as a vent for Bill's otherwise unexpressed exasperation. They drove a mile or more in silence, and it was not until their road took them through the now abandoned construction camp that he turned to his chief again.

"Bring them back here, Mr. Chance," he pleaded. "Put up your canvas again around the buildings, and tell those long-haired never-sweats to get to hell out of there. And make

those boys work. Let me and McCune get busy and drive them some. No job ever got done this way but Hobbema's hen-coop. And that's about the way these last buildings will look if we go on like this. We can do it, do it in a month, like we done the dam and the temple, if you'll only give us a chance."

"The trouble with you, Bill," his chief said thoughtfully, "is that you only understand one kind of a job, the kind we did on the temple and the dam. That job was to get something done, no matter how. We did it so fast we took their breath, and it was all over and the canvas put away before they knew what had happened. But it wouldn't work again. We took long chances trying it once, and we only did it because there was no other way."

"Well, it worked," said Bill. "They all believed it; it was too easy and too successful for them to do anything else. And I don't see why it wouldn't work again."

"In the first place, there are sceptics looking on now as well as believers, people who can see through a ladder. And the believers themselves don't really believe it; they think they do, that's all. The whole job from now on is to make them

believe it so that they won't have to stop to think. Frame that idea up where you can look at it twice a day. Make these few men we've kept act like the Beechcrofters. Of course they'll be lazy; I kept the laziest and the stupidest ones of the whole bunch, and you ought to be able to see why. And get the disciples to help; draw them into it — talk their talk if you can. See that the men themselves and McCune don't talk at all. It's one of the ground rules here that you don't have to answer when people speak to you; you're supposed to be in contemplation, as they say, and it's precious lucky for us it's so. Rub that into McCune; he mustn't swear at all, at anybody; not even nights." He had been talking with a good deal of emphasis and a touch of impatience, for this was by no means his first attempt to impress the significance of the new job on his superintendent. But now, after a moment's silence, he smiled. "I'd hate to be one of McCune's gang when he gets a job marked *rush* again," he said.

When most of the real workmen at Beechcroft had been paid off, and the score or so Chance retained had been dressed in tunics and housed in the lower valley like real disciples, he had

moved his quarters too. He had a pleasant, though, needless to say, "artistic" little cottage not far from the stream, and about in the middle of the valley. Hither he now made his way, intent on shedding his city clothes and getting into his cool gray tunic and sandals as speedily as possible.

The change once effected, his manner became leisurely again. He strolled out into his shady veranda and idly scanned the valley, at first merely with the eye and then, though not as if looking for anything particular, with a field-glass. The scrutiny was productive of nothing in the way of interest, and he stood musing awhile after putting them down. Presently he went out across the already sun-tanned meadow to the flat top of a big rock that jutted over the stream.

The surface of a pool, ten feet or more below, smiled an invitation to him, which the warm, late June, mid-afternoon sun, beating on his bare head and reflecting from the smooth face of the rock, seconded. His tunic and sandals interposed no veto, so, straightening his arms above his head, he sprang well out into the air, seemed for an instant to hang, motionless, like

a bent bow, and then, straightening out, shot downward and cleft the smiling, placid surface of the pool with hardly a splatter.

But in the midst of his flight he heard an exclamation of surprise that made him check the momentum of his shallow dive as quickly as possible and strike out for the nearer shore. He scrambled out on a shelving bit of gravel, picked his way round a big boulder into a dry, moss-grown grotto, formed by the jutting ledge of rock from which he had dived, and stood face to face with Cynthia.

He looked at her, tried, with an impatient gesture, to wipe away with his wet hands the water that was trickling down into his eyes, then looked again, still without speaking. She looked at him, too, flushing a little, her lips slightly parted. The silence lasted until, with something of an effort, she broke it.

"I didn't know you were back from New York."

"I only came this moment," he said absently. "I searched the valley — with a glass, not knowing, quite, for what — not knowing it was for you." He repeated his former gesture and shook the water from his hair.

"There are some lines of poetry — some-

where," he said, "but I can't quite recall them. 'Queen and Huntress—' They won't come for me."

"Oh, I know them." She spoke with a sort of nervous eagerness, and began repeating old Ben Jonson's lovely little hymn to Diana. But under his gaze the flush in her cheeks mantled deeper and deeper, and soon, a little out of breath, she broke off, leaving the hymn unfinished.

"'Goddess, excellently bright!'" he echoed, and added thoughtfully, "it's your hymn, you know. Cynthia was just one of her names.—How did they know that you were going to look like moonlight?"

For a moment she had no word at all to say; then, with an effort, she managed to rally her scattered wits. A glint of mockery came into her eyes. "They named me after my Aunt Cynthia," she said, "Aunt Augusta's sister."

He did not smile; his eyes still gazed thoughtfully out over the shining surface of the pool, and she became clearly aware that if any one were to command this situation, and it seemed high time that some one did, it must be herself. It had always been his task before, but to-day, without warning or ceremony, he had abandoned

it and she must take it up. She did not much want to; she had to resist pretty hard an impulse to fall in with his own new mood. Her voice jarred horribly on her own ears when next she spoke.

“How do you like my new clothes?” she asked.

It was the first time he had seen her in any dress but that of the twentieth century. In fact, the thing that had first mitigated his dismay on discovering that she had chosen the unhealthy, sentimental atmosphere of Beechcroft in which to work at the job he had once advised her to find, was the reassuring fact that she had brought her sense of humor along with her. She had spurned the lank robes of her sister disciples and announced her intention of devising something which should at once accord with the simple beauty of the new religion and still possess the added advantage of not making her look like a frump. She would not consent to look like a figure out of the chorus of Patience for her Aunt Augusta nor the prophet, Stein, nor for anybody. She pleased John Chance, and materially relieved his mind, by telling him so. If she were in as sane a mood as that, he reflected, Beechcroft would not hurt her much.

Well, she had solved her problem triumphantly. The white serge robe with its silver embroidered "walls of Troy" had the look of an Empire gown, but with all the Gallic frivolity purified out of it. She was clad, not swathed, in it, like her sister toilers, and the dead white and silver of the robe made warm and faintly flushed and human what it revealed of her throat and slender arms. Her amazing, luminous hair was confined in a broad, pale gold ampyx with opal buckles and a net of finely corded gold threads.

Chance did not look at her when she asked him how he liked them, and his reply made the fact that he did not significant. "I suppose they were a part of what took my breath," he said slowly. "I've never seen you so before. You've always been — shaded, before; even that afternoon of carnival."

She had a reply ready this time, the light common-sensical sentence she needed to pull him back to the plane of every day; but she hesitated to utter it, hesitated until he spoke again.

"I came up from New York a day sooner than I meant. I felt in a hurry to be back. I was impatient of the slow drive from the station, and of Bill Hemenway, who had come to meet me

and wanted to tell me his troubles. Something was drawing me back here, and I didn't know what it was. I didn't know until I came around from behind that rock and saw you."

"I wish," Cynthia began; her voice did not sound quite right, but she went steadily on. "I wish I could solve the problem of my life here as successfully as I seem to have solved the problem of my clothes." Her speech was broken by many pauses, and punctuated by the little pebbles which idly, from time to time, she tossed into the pool. "Though I'm not sure that I've succeeded with them. Aunt Augusta thinks they're too conspicuous, and of course she's right. But I just couldn't put on those clinging, dragging things the rest wear. — Oh, I'd have done it if you had —" she looked at him, smiling, — "ordered me to; but you didn't. And Mr. Stein likes these. He said something — well, about letting my light shine and about it being my duty."

His silence no longer troubled her. She was no longer making up things to say, and as she went on she was talking quite as much to herself as to him. "I suppose one ought to have something I lack, or to lack something I have, to be

even a good disciple; and Mr. Stein wants me to help him inspire the others and — and convert them. When he talks to me I can feel it all. And I feel it still more when I look up at the upper valley and see what he did — what he is doing right before our eyes. When I see that lovely dream of his coming true, coming true under our clumsy hands, I feel ashamed that I'm so petty and frivolous. There's a sort of glow away down deep in me that tries to come out, tries to make me something different. But the rest of it —

“Oh, it will be hard for you to understand. You're one of his builders, you're right there, a part of the miracle. But when I try to make things, it doesn't make my soul flower; it just makes me feel ridiculous. And what the others make is ridiculous, sometimes. Aunt Augusta is weaving a rug, and she's so solemn and earnest about it that it's — well, downright common and ill-bred to smile over it. But I do. I make fun of it, and hurt her feelings dreadfully. I bite my tongue for it afterward, but that's too late to do any good.”

This time it was a larger pebble that fell with an impatient splash into the pool. “I suppose you're wondering whether it was worth the trouble

sending me home from Paris, from what I thought was looking-glass country. I'm not much good. I'm idle and discontented here just as I was before, except when I look up the valley at that dream that's coming true. If I could have it before my eyes always — perhaps I could be the — the priestess he wants to make me. If you would help me again the way you did that night in Paris — It isn't very inspiring to have Mr. Pole painting another portrait of me."

That stung her companion out of his reverie, and he turned upon her. "Pole!" he exclaimed.

"Mr. Stein wanted him to. It's not begun yet. He's still fussing around trying to find a pose and the place to paint me. I suppose he will go making 'arrangements' for weeks before he really begins. That's why we came down to this grotto. He's gone back to his studio to get some draperies and pillows and things."

"So he's coming back here," said Chance. Then he got briskly to his feet and held out his hand to her. "Come," he said.

A little surprised, but with a smile flowering on her lips, she said, "Where?"

"Wherever we shan't have to expect him to make a third."

She hesitated, but still smiling. This brusque, decisive man was much more like the one she felt she knew. Already he was leading the way around the boulder and toward the upper end of the pool. With something like a laugh, she followed.

An awkward row of stepping-stones crossed the brook at this point, but the water was high, and two of them, in the middle, were submerged. He turned and held out his arms. "I'll carry you over," he said.

She smiled and colored a little, but shook her head. "I'd hardly do what you did, — dive into the pool just as I am, but I don't mind going ankle deep."

He hesitated, but finally nodded assent. "It will rid us of Pole, anyway. Six inches of water will stop him."

"He's like a bloodhound, isn't he," she suggested, and both of them paid the small joke rather more in the way of laughter than it was worth. She crossed with no more assistance than the clasp of his hand, and even this was gratuitous.

And when they were over, when they had crossed the rock ledges on the farther side, even when they began the easy ascent of the broad,

well-beaten trail, when what had been a mere courtesy became a caress, he still held the hand in his.

The action brought up to her mind a memory which had frequented it much of late; of an evening in a Paris restaurant and a moment when he had reached across the table and taken both her hands, held them, for a breath or two, in a grip that almost hurt, a moment when it seemed as if he were pulling her up, bodily, over the brink of a precipice. After a moment like that he had a right to her hands if he wanted them. It would be absurd, childish, to deny them to him. That was the way the matter — and no great matter, either, she told herself — would certainly have appeared to the cool, friendly, well-poised Cynthia she was still trying to be; so for a little while it lay, trembling very much in spite of her, against his palm.

But she could not endure it; the contact was too live. It carried a message only half intelligible and wholly bewildering. Presently, as gently as she could, she drew it away. He walked on steadily beside her, helping her, where she needed it, over the rough parts of the way, as if nothing had happened. They had left the trail,

and soon came out at the place he had been leading her to, a pleasant, warm little terrace she had never found before, well up the side of the north ridge.

"Is this where you were taking me?" she asked, but seated herself without waiting for a reply on a big, half-embedded stone and clasped her knee in her two hands. "It's lovely — How near your house looks down there — If we could only see the lake and the temple, it would be perfect."

"There are times when I like not to see the lake and the temple," he said.

She wondered why, but he offered no explanation, and she asked for none. She sat there, nursing her knee and letting her gaze run idly over the cottages and trim gardens of Beechcroft.

"Some one is trying to get into your house," she said presently. "He's been knocking at your front door, and now he's going around to the back. It can't be Mr. Pole, can it?"

"He'd never try both doors, even if he wanted to see me, which he doesn't. We can forget him altogether."

"I'd feel a little guilty about that — letting him carry those pillows and silk draperies down there to the grotto for nothing — if you hadn't

ordered me to do it." She laughed. "I wonder why I go on minding you. I do, somehow. It's getting to be a habit with me. I never did it for any one before, and I seem to like it."

"You mustn't mind me any more," he said soberly.

"You don't want the responsibility?" she questioned, mocking. "You're tired of having me for part of your job?"

But she could not get a smile from him. "I'm not fit for the job," he said. Then he roused himself and added, almost roughly: "Don't mind me. Don't mind anybody. Don't mind Stein."

A puzzled look came into her eyes. "But you mind Mr. Stein, don't you?" The quietness of her manner contrasted strongly with his. "We all do, don't we?"

"Not in the way I mean you shouldn't. He's not the gate of heaven. He's a man. He's fallible, like any other man."

She sighed. "I suppose I see what you mean. But I wish things were clearer. I wish I could make it seem worth while to bind flabby little books, or weave rugs like Aunt Augusta's."

"Oh, as for that," he said, "I suppose one could find a real job, even here at Beechcroft."

The words were part of the expression of a mood as new to himself as it was to Cynthia. From the moment he had come upon her beside the pool he had been in the grip of a set of forces he did not understand. He was bewildered, half afraid, like those Genoese mariners whom the mysterious trade-wind was carrying out to the world's edge; like one following an unknown clew through a labyrinth. And in this mood he kicked impatiently at the Beechcroft Idea as a man does at an insignificant obstacle he stumbles over in the dark.

But Cynthia's next words had an imperative quality in them that pierced even so heavy an abstraction as his. "You believe in Beechcroft, don't you? You're here with us because you believe it? It isn't for some — some other reason altogether that you're here?"

"No," he said. "It's not for any other reason."

The moment the words were uttered silence settled down between them, a silence that vibrated with a strange sort of excitement. He went over to the edge of the terrace and stood looking down the valley. He was not thinking of the lie, nor even of the fact that he had lied to her. He was not really thinking at

all, but standing astonished, rather, in the presence of a miracle.

For the lie, which had come to his lips automatically enough, had been like the magic chemical reagent added to a muddy compound in a beaker, transforming it in an instant into a flashing, crystalline liquor with a slimy deposit at the bottom of the glass. It had been a sword-flash which had shorn asunder the veil that hung before his Holy of Holies. A long time he stood there in the deep recessed silence of the hills, a hazy June sky, cloud-streaked, before his unseeing eyes. The blood was drumming in his temples, drumming a wild song. He knew, at last, whither the mysterious, eternal trade-wind had been carrying him. He had discovered his New World.

She had risen too, and stood not far away, out in the frank sunshine, the wind blowing her robe into a closer embrace of her lithe body. Her unblown hair, held fast in the ampyx and the golden net, looked, in its strange contrast with the clinging, fluttering robe, like the steadfast glory of a saint. "She made me think of the Angel of the Resurrection," some one had said of her once before, and the sentence came back

into Chance's mind as, after a stolen, momentary glance at her, he lowered his eyes.

"I wonder," he said unsteadily — his voice was curiously harsh in quality, hardly articulate at all — "I wonder whether any man has ever told you that he loved you." After a little silence he went on more evenly, but still without looking up at her. "A man couldn't do that — couldn't offer that, unless he — expected it back; unless it seemed natural and — right that it should be given back to him. And with you, a man would be more likely to go away, and keep you — among his dreams, not daring to think they could come true. After the day in Paris you seemed like that to me, seemed like an apparition. I suppose that is the real reason, though I didn't know it, why I wouldn't let you tell me your name; because I felt you belonged with my dreams and not with my realities. The only way I tried to make the dream come true was by trying to build you into that temple at the head of the valley. — And yet, in these days since you came here, until to-day when I found you there beside the pool, you've seemed different. All the way up from New York this afternoon I was as happy as a boy just because

I was coming back to you, no more in awe of you than if you had been a child. You've been a comrade to me for this little handful of days. I liked the way you made a parade of obeying me, liked feeling older and more experienced and —" he interrupted himself with a short laugh — "wiser than you. But to-day, when I came upon you, crowned, when I saw the full glory of you, unshaded, you seemed an apparition again. To-day, suddenly, I found myself — afraid."

She did not speak, but he heard her moving past him on the grass, and knew, without raising his eyes, that she had gone back to the half-embedded rock that had served as her seat before. At last —

"Look," she said.

He obeyed her. She had been fumbling at the opal buckles which held the pale gold ampyx and the net, and at the moment he raised his eyes she succeeded in releasing them. Her hair, bound before, immobile, a steadfast glory like an angel's aureole, fell in a loose coil on the nape of her white neck, and little crinkled love-locks of it caressed her ears. And somehow the simple decoronation made her a girl again. Her

eyes were bright, but with tears, with a light that was very human, very wistful. The ampyx and the golden net dangled from her trembling fingers.

He understood. And yet he hesitated; he, too, stayed trembling where he was. A new sort of timidity held him, a timidity bred of the very things that are supposed to destroy such a feeling,—sophistication, experience, long life in the “world,” in various worlds. The numerous little will-o'-the-wisps of love he had followed at one time or another with such care-free abandon, made the effulgence of this light an awesome thing to approach. It was not as a goddess that she awed him, it was as a maid. He met her eyes, indeed, but that was all.

The silence that fell between them was invaded by a sound below on the hillside, a sound of crackling twigs and the swish of bushes that caught at some intruder in a vain attempt to stop his progress. The steady crescendo of these sounds made it evident that he, whoever he might be, was coming straight toward their terrace, and presently Chance, who had walked down to the edge of it, caught sight of him. He was a carpenter named Hicks, one of the precious twenty retained because they could be trusted not to

work too hard nor to exercise an embarrassing amount of intelligence.

The sight of him affected Chance unpleasantly. It was not the moment he would have chosen for having this fraud, in which he had been Stein's partner and of which Cynthia herself was one of the victims, thrust in his face. It came to rather more than that, too. Seeing him there, as he supposed, alone, the man was likely enough to say something which would betray, if not the whole thing, at least altogether too much. The expedient which instantly occurred to him, of silencing him by a sight of Cynthia, he as promptly dismissed. She should not be profaned at this moment by any other eyes than his, let alone should she be used, unconsciously, in playing any part of his game.

What he did was to walk down the hill a little way to meet Hicks. He felt like a sneak for doing as much as that, and his manner to the carpenter was not conciliatory.

"What do you want?" he asked curtly.

"They told me as I'd find you at your 'ouse, sir; and I went there and waited. And when I got tired waiting I took a look around with your glass and made you out up 'ere. So I took the

liberty to follow. I want to arsk just one question. 'Oo is the boss of this job?"

"Don't shout," said Chance, sharply. "I am, and you know it. What's your real question?"

"Well, then, here's my real question, if you want it. That little rat with the blue band around him, — him they call the Overseer, — is he to come overseeing me and 'indering my work whenever he takes the notion? Am I to take orders from 'im?"

"You know the answer to that, too," said Chance. "You are."

"I was minding my own business, sir, filing a cross-cut saw, and this overseer, 'e comes along and begins giving me abuse about my 'infernal din'; those was his words. And when I paid no attention to him, he tried to take away the saw. I didn't want to make trouble, so I let him take it, and came stright for you, sir."

"Go to the store keeper and get a new saw," said Chance. "I'll see about the other later. You should have stopped when he first told you to."

The words were accompanied with a nod of dismissal, but the carpenter did not take the hint. He stood rubbing his hands together a moment, and then laughed. "Well, it's a queer job, sure

enough," he said. "And maybe there's nothing scaly about it, and maybe there is. I'll not presume to say." He laughed again, and set off down the hill.

Chance stood watching him as he crashed his way through the bushes down to the trail; watched until he was out of sight and remained gazing awhile after. He understood now why the new job made Bill Hemenway unhappy, why he couldn't understand it. Bill was an honest man! And the job was so patently dishonest that even Hicks's thick wits had discovered the fact. But he — himself —

A wry smile came on his lips. What a man the prophet was! How well he appraised men! How well he had known what he was about when he made him that proposition up in Moberly Pole's studio!

And then the smile, mirthless as it was, faded. Cynthia was waiting there on the terrace for him to come back to her; Cynthia, whom he loved, and who — yes, he was honest enough to face the situation without blinking — who, he was sure, loved him. Cynthia, to whom he had lied, and who must, by now, have at least an uneasy inkling of the truth.

Well, she should know the truth now, without palliation, should know the worst there was to tell, as starkly as he could tell it, whether it left any residue of him that she could love and respect or not. It was with a feeling of grim satisfaction that he made his way back to the terrace.

But when he found her, when he saw her rise and come, half eager, half timid, a little way to meet him, he saw, even though blind love of her blurred his sight, that hers was not the face of one waiting to sit in judgment. She guessed much; the eager, vivid curiosity in her eyes made that plain. But it was not for the purpose of assessing the good and the bad in him, finding a verdict and giving sentence, that she wanted the truth. She wanted it because she wanted to share his soul; wanted all the sin and sorrow in it as well as the joy, just because it was his. He knew, when he had read that look, that he would be forgiven; indeed, forgiving was hardly the term she would apply to it. And then — then they would shake the dust of Beechcroft from their feet and go out into a cleaner, sweeter world, together.

But at that, with the words of his confession already framed on his lips, there came something

that checked him like a tap on a great bell; something that surcharged itself in staring black letters straight across his moral retina.

The one thing more despicable than to lie to her, would be to tell her the truth.

Already he was a fraud; he was Stein's partner and had pocketed his share of the swag. But what term would be mean enough to describe him if, after all, he peached; if he turned state's evidence against his partner to secure immunity for himself. That, just that, was what telling Cynthia the truth she wanted would come to.

He dared not trust himself to reason, to think. He just held on, throttling by main strength of will the wild cry of confession that his soul set up. Something of the struggle showed in his face; he was white under his coat of tan, and his lips pressed tightly together. But he stood straight before her, courageously meeting her eyes. He watched the light die out of them and come again, accompanied this time by a faint flush of anger. And he saw that die out, too.

"I must go back to my work," he said.

He turned to leave her, then paused. "Can I help you down the trail?" he asked. "It's pretty rough."

“No, thanks,” she said. Her voice had the perfect nuance of careless amiability, and it hurt like a knife-stab.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE STAKE AND THE PLAYERS

THE curious and disquieting behavior of the carpenter Hicks, though not forgotten, came to be rather lost sight of in the general demoralization of the working force that daily, during the ensuing week or so, was coming more and more seriously to be reckoned with. There was no work to be got out of them, there was no possibility of enforcing discipline, and at last Bill Hemenway's grotesque prediction came true. The men actually struck.

When that happened, there was only one thing to do. To listen to a word of their complaints would only make matters worse. Chance ordered them rounded up at the old shack behind the temple, had the whole crew paid off, and in order to be completely rid of them as quickly as possible, promised an extra week's pay to all who should catch the evening train to the city.

The bonus was large enough to be attractive to such riff-raff as they were, and Chance was a little surprised, at the end of an hour's work in the model room of the shack, to be informed by Henry Baumann that one of the workmen had not gone, and insisted on seeing him.

"Who is the man?" Chance asked. "What's his name?"

"A carpenter named Hicks," Henry told him.

"All right," he said. "Send him into the front office."

And then, during the minute or so that elapsed, his mind worked at top speed. Who was this man, Hicks? Why had he, instead of certain other, noisier men, been the one to complain to him so insolently. He recalled now, for the first time, that there had always been something dimly familiar in the face and figure of the man, something familiar in the way he climbed a scaffold and in the way he swung a hammer. Then abruptly his fingers stopped drumming the table. A curious expression came into his face. For, after all, in spite of his care from the moment he first entered Beechcroft to employ men who knew nothing about him, who did not even know his surname, here was a fellow who had worked

for him at Atlanta — no, at Omaha — no, at — But no matter where. Hicks knew him. That was sufficient to complicate an exceedingly delicate situation. More than this, the man was evidently aware that the knowledge might be worth something, or he would not so causally have forfeited an extra pay envelope.

Well, whatever was to be done, must be done quickly. Wherever he was, at Beechcroft, or at New York, Hicks was pretty likely to prove a high explosive. With what he knew, he could blow up the place. Chance had not the slightest hold at this moment, on any plan which would effectually close his mouth. The only plan he could hit on, as he sat there listening to the approaching footsteps, was the temporary expedient of holding the man at Beechcroft until he could somehow dispose of him.

Hicks came slowly and sullenly into the room. Chance gave no sign that he heard him. Hicks cleared his throat. "Look here," he observed, "I've got something to say to you."

The remark faded out, for the back of the master builder was imperturbable. And when at last he swung around in his chair, apparently he was not aware that Hicks had spoken.

"I wanted to see you," he said, curtness and buoyant good-humor in his manner, "because I shan't let you go with the others. I need you on the millwright work for the present. That's all."

He swung around again to the table. The only next move which Hicks could hit on with any sense of fitness was to withdraw. Accordingly he left the room and the shack, and walked down the road into the cool, early June evening.

When he had gone, Chance reached for the desk telephone, and tried to get Hobbema's house, but could not connect. This was annoying. But he could telephone from the steel-room in the temple. He had turned that room over to the prophet, but he happened to know that one of the two keys still lay here in a drawer of his desk. He did not propose on this evening to go to Stein. He proposed that Stein should come to him. And so he found the key, went down to the dark temple, mounted the platform, crossed the robing-room, and coolly unlocking the sacred steel door and switching on the drop-light that ornamented the mahogany table, he called up the house of the overseer. Hobbema himself answered.

"Well, Comrade," he said, "what can I do for you?"

"You can find Mr. Stein, if you will be so good," said Chance, "and ask him to meet me, before dark, on the steps of the temple. It is important that he come to that place just as soon as possible."

Hobbema mused. This was an extraordinary request. But it was explicit; and he knew the master builder well enough now to indulge in no questions. It was simply a matter of complying, or not. He complied. And a little bewildered by the note of authority in Chance's voice, his narrow mind groping darkly through a situation which had grown out of his comprehension, he hurried over to the prophet's house. This was, it would seem, to be an evening of surprises for the general overseer of the Beechcroft activities.

The house of the prophet was not only imposing, on its broad terrace, and under its great beeches, it was also, or it always had been, a symbol of all that was methodical, orderly, serene. There was never any noise in or about Mr. Stein's dwelling; there was never confusion; nothing was ever out of place. The butler,

the coachman, and the five maids who made up that devout, silent household, were but parts of a well-regulated little machine, whose object was to surround Stein, the man, with every comfort. And the directing of this machine, the constant regulating and adjusting of it, had been the life-work of the plain, sad, gray little woman known, when she was known at all, as Comrade Louisa, the wife of Herman Stein.

Hobbema swung the knocker, and waited. He swung it again, — and still he waited. This was unusual. Through the open windows came occasional sounds of activity within. A third time he knocked. He walked slowly the length of the veranda and back again. Finally, through the broad glass in the upper part of the door, he saw the butler approaching, but without his usual expression of utter woodenness. Something not unlike emotion was written on his smooth-shaven face. His hands were dusty; and his coat was partly unbuttoned, as if he had been interrupted in manual labor, and had hastily thrown it on.

Hobbema looked narrowly at him. "Is Mr. Stein here, Joseph?"

"No, sir."

"Can you tell me where he is?"

"I can't, sir. He has been away since morning."

There were several packing-cases in the hall, and heaps of excelsior on the floor. Books were scattered about. Pictures, some crated, others not, were leaning against the wall.

Hobbema half turned, hesitated, then peered in again through the doorway. "What is all this?" he asked. "Who is going away, Joseph?"

The butler looked out toward the beeches. His hand gripped the door-knob more tightly. "Mrs. Stein is going away, sir."

Hobbema's eyes flashed with a curiosity so eager that it was fairly morbid. "This is — a surprise, Joseph. I — I should like to see her, if she —"

"Very sorry, sir, but she has asked to be excused from seeing anybody."

There was a silence, then the overseer drew on, with an effort, the cloak of solemn dignity with which he habitually covered his mental nakedness, and walked down to the road. Here he did not hesitate. He felt pretty certain that he knew where to go next.

The pleasant cottage which was occupied by Cynthia and her aunt stood halfway down the

lower valley, close by a little brook which lingered beside it as if unwilling to lose its identity in the larger stream just beyond. There were pines here among the beeches, and they were so grouped on the western side that the evening shadows fell early over the cottage, and deepened the color of its malachite green stain, and softened the interior tones on its flat, simply ornamented walls. And so now, although daylight still held in the valley, twilight had entered the cottage, and had brought with it the mysteries that hover midway between daylight and dark. The door and the windows were open, and the faint noises of early evening came floating in from tree and meadow to blend gently with the tinkle and gurgle of the brook and with the deepening shadows.

Cynthia sat curled up on the window-seat, gazing out and down, cheek resting on hand, into a black pool just below, where the dusky reflections ceaselessly wavered and broke and re-formed and wavered again. There was a fascination almost hypnotic in the dark, quivering surface of the water. Her delicately outlined face seemed to have grown, in that half light, suddenly fragile. Herman Stein stood silent in the shadow, looking down at her. He was

big, commanding, yet gentle. She could feel his steady eyes upon her. They frightened her a little. And still, so long as it was impersonal this way, so long as his closeness to her seemed mental, even spiritual, rather than physical, there was something almost restful in his mastery.

On the square-legged little table at her elbow lay an open copy of "Toil and Triumph," dog-eared and pencilled. Scraps of paper lay about, covered with snatches of exegesis in Stein's unformed hand — a hand which he never employed when an amanuensis or a stenographer was available, and which was the only outwardly weak thing about him.

Finally he spoke, slowly and with deep feeling.

"I wish I could tell you, Comrade, what your progress in the spirit of our faith means to me, and to us all. It has been hard for me. I have stood alone. I have known what it means to fight for the faith. I have often stumbled — oh, so often! It has not always been given me to see the light. Sometimes I have wished that another — a better, a stronger leader might be given to carry my people forward." His deep, still eyes did not waver from the dim outline of her cheek and from her straying, luminous hair.

"And now you have come like a shining light into our lives. I do not mean to speak in a personal way, Comrade. It is not I, the poor-spirited man, speaking to you, the girl who is so full of youth and charm and feeling. No — it is not like that. It is something higher and better than you or I which moves me to say this — something so much higher and better that we can only serve it, and give our lives to it, and perhaps, some day — who knows — die for it. That —" he paused; there was suppressed emotion in his voice — "that would be wonderful, Comrade."

He saw that she was listening.

"What we have needed — now — when we have come almost within sight of our triumph — is the inspired leader — the leader with a spark from the flame of Heaven in her eyes — what I have hoped for, prayed for, is the Joan of Arc who could lead us over the line that separates toil from triumph. And that — that inspired, that almost divine one, must be a woman. I can lead no farther. No man can lead us farther."

She looked up in quick protest. She was conscious of the uprush of a great, a splendid pur-

pose within herself, of a possession which seemed to exalt her above the weaknesses and desires of humankind. Her eyes were shining as they had shone when first they saw the splendid picture in the upper valley; but suddenly, when they met his, they fell away, and her cheek again rested on her hand, and again she looked into the dusky pool.

“Oh, Comrade,” he continued, “you can never understand what it would have meant to us if we could have had you ten years ago — could have had you as you are to-day, young, beautiful, full of the glamour of spring. If — if my wife could have been like you! If somebody had supported me in my work — if somebody had believed in it — if somebody had cared! But that —” he seemed to be steadying himself — “even that is over now. She never cared; and now she is leaving me. Once more I stand alone. But I am learning. It has taught me that human alliances are feeble. I will not be weak again — I will not be a man, with a man’s desires. I will be a prophet. I will live only for the triumph of our faith. When that is achieved, I will die. And it is you, Comrade, who have inspired me, lifted me, who have shown me that

the true way is not the poor, human way, but that it is the divine way. What is this world that it should claim our bodies? What are the joys and sorrows of this world that they should sway us from the work we have to do?" The emotion that was stirring within him suddenly broke through the restraint he had put upon it. "Yes," he said, "it is you. It is you who shine out of my temple. It was you — the splendid woman — who dominated me, who guided my hand, when I built it — when I built you into it!" He did not see the odd, startled expression that flitted across her face at this.

He looked at her hair, at the soft outline of her cheek, turned halfway from him, at her slender hand, at her young body. He could not take his eyes from her. The earthly man his tongue had just renounced was surging within him. He had made her listen. She was almost his. His hands were tingling to grip hers and hold them. He wavered and took a half step forward. And then, the other man within him, the cooler man, still the stronger, took the reins. He stood motionless, his hands clenched, his shadowy face hard and expressionless. The great mind was revolving slowly, oh, so slowly! — and settling

normally on its axis. A false step now would spell disaster. And he knew, his colder mind knew, that the man could never accomplish his new purpose, that only the prophet could win her.

Slowly, master of himself now, he drew up a chair, and sat beside her.

"You are tired, Comrade," he said gently. "I have tired you. It means so much to me. After all, our course is not difficult to plan now. With you by me, I can see the light. We will stand together for the faith. Side by side, we will renounce the world, and carry the banner onward. We will travel far, and spread the truth in every corner of the land, in every land. We will live, together, for the best there is in us, in order that our lives may inspire my people — our people." And without the slightest pause or change of manner, he went on: "It will perhaps be well to observe the conventions of the world, foolish as they sometimes seem. It may seem best, as our work develops and defines itself, that the separation between my wife and myself be made legal, and that you and I submit to the outward forms of marriage. But that hardly matters." He paused, now, and said, very

quietly: "The only thing that matters is what we may be able to do for our fellow-men. Let us hope and pray that we may lead them — millions of them — into the peace and beauty of soul that is built on character. It is a splendid thought."

And again, as he looked at her, his hands tingled and his fingers pressed into his palms.

There was a knock at the door.

Cynthia started up, and gave a nervous little exclamation, and shook back the loose locks of her hair.

And then a man came a few steps into the room; and peering forward, they both made out the thin figure and the narrow shoulders of overseer Hobbema.

Stein slowly rose and stood solidly. In the dusk he looked the prophet, calm and self-controlled. Hobbema could not see the momentary glitter in his eyes.

"Well, what is it?" he said.

Hobbema was not at his ease. "I have just had a message from Comrade John. He asks very urgently that you meet him, at once, before dark, on the steps of the temple."

"Did he give no reason?" asked Stein.

"None."

There was a long silence. Cynthia drew back into the shadows beside the window. Hobbema took a desultory step or two toward the door.

"Very well," said the prophet then. He turned and extended his hand. "Good night, Comrade," he said.

"Good night," she replied in a low voice that she herself hardly recognized.

They were gone. Those inscrutable eyes were no longer fixed on her. And combating her memory of their power, fighting with them for the possession of her thoughts, was the memory of the man she had thought she loved — not Comrade John, she did not understand him, but the other, the Monsieur Jean who had made her mind.

Trembling a little, she leaned on the sill, and looked out again at the pool, and watched the foam-flecks that now and then set the deep reflections quivering. There was no one, now, to tell her what to do.

. . . . .

A solitary figure was coming deliberately up the north promenade. John Chance, sitting on the top step of the great flight before the temple,

waited until the figure began to ascend the slope, then he moved down the steps and waited. The twilight was not far advanced here in the open. A moment more, and the two men stood face to face. The prophet bowed coldly, but Chance ignored his manner.

"I have asked you to come up here in person, Mr. Stein, because what I have to say will be enforced by the spectacle this valley makes right now."

Stein's eyes followed the gesture, and rested on the row of half-built structures on either side of the lake. These structures were the shops, dormitories, and studios which Chance had begun after the convention visitors had returned to their homes. There was no doubt that in their present condition they gravely impaired the beauty of the valley. Wooden skeletons, partly hidden behind rough boards (many of which came from lots of second-hand lumber which Chance had picked up) stood boldly out, naked, angular, fringed with scaffolding and bordered with lumber piles, dirt heaps, and mortar beds. The sheet-iron, with which the more nearly completed buildings were sheathed, had not yet been painted, and it added broad surfaces of rust to the picture.

"The conditions have changed since we built the temple," Chance continued. "Nowadays visitors, dozens of them at a time, are coming in here to see the miracle they have read about. The papers are watching us, too. We have no time to lose in completing these buildings, painting them, and clearing away the rubbish. The interiors don't matter. But we must patch up the looks of this valley, and do it quick. I'm too much of a showman, myself, to enjoy it as it is. There's no triumph in that mess."

On that other occasion, when the master builder had coupled his character as a showman with the spirit of Beechcroft, the prophet had let it pass as the mental vivacity of a young man. But now it irritated him; and it was not easy for him to present the gravely inquiring countenance which Chance saw.

"And now," the younger man went on, very deliberately, "you are wondering why I brought you here to tell you this. It is because I discharged all my men this afternoon, — all but one, to be exact, — and the work has stopped."

Stein gave him a quick look. "I have no doubt you had a good reason for that course?"

"I felt that I had."

“And can’t you employ other men?”

Chance shook his head. “No, for two reasons. The plan of making imitation Beechcrofters out of hired workingmen is a failure. They can’t be handled that way. It seemed worth a trial, but I know now that it won’t work. It’s better to let the buildings rot as they are than to give the Associated Press a two-column story on the strike of the workmen who were making Herman Stein’s visions to blossom like the rose — with drunks, riots, and incidental shootings on the side.”

The master builder delivered this thrust with cool scorn. He was sick of Stein.

“And the other reason?”

“I kept one of the men here because I found that he knows my name and my history, and he has the beginnings of an understanding that we shouldn’t like him to give either to the Associated Press.”

Stein was finding it difficult to keep his temper in the presence of this self-possessed young man who despised him.

“What have you to propose?” he asked, with a new snap in his voice.

“That we try to get a little real work out of the Beechcrofters.”

"What do you mean by that?"

"That you and I, Stein, stop lying for a few weeks. We can't stop altogether — you will still claim that you conceived this picture, and that's a lie. But we can make your people do the rest of the work. It won't hurt them."

Chance cared no more for the flush of anger that spread slowly over the heavy face than he had cared for the imposing dignity of the moment before. And so, while Stein was struggling with the slow temper that threatened to master him, he finished what he had to say.

"I have no authority to call out the guilds and set everybody at work to-morrow morning. But that is the course I recommend to you." And with that he turned away, and tossed a bit of stone into the mist of the cascade. It would not be good business for Stein to lose his temper at this stage, and Chance gave him a little time in which to recover it.

Stein walked a few steps away, and stood by the parapet. The evening was quiet, except for the music of the little waterfall. In the western and northern sky a warm red afterglow was spreading, and some of its color got into the still water, and added, as the ugly objects on the banks

receded into the dusk, a new charm to the picture Chance had made. Above them, on its elevation at the top of the wide stairway, towered the temple, which meant so much to them both.

As if by some tacit understanding they turned and faced each other. Each was squarely uncompromising — Chance firm, Stein hard. And each was cool now. Their eyes met, and an odd little flash passed between them. Yes, Stein was big. He would be a hard man to fight — and defeat. There was something admirable, after all, in the way he had put down that slow, cold temper of his. If it ever broke away from him, the spectacle would be worth seeing. Men do not like to be told that their lives are a lie, especially if the charge be true. It is not the sort of thing a man forgets. Stein would not forget it. But it was the impassive, the impersonal prophet who now spoke.

"I have a little work to do now at the temple," he said, speaking slowly and very distinctly, "before I go down. But I will consider your suggestion, and communicate with you a little later. I am inclined to believe that your plan is the best — perhaps the only one to follow."

With a slight bow he ascended the steps.

## CHAPTER VIII

### WIRES AND THE MARIONETTE

THE prophet's road from the temple to his house led him past Hobbema's, and the light from its windows arrested his attention and put a term to his revery. It was another manifestation of the immense reserves of Stein's power, that after two such scenes as he had just come through, the exaltation of one and the violent revulsion of the other, and with his dismantled home before him, he was able to take up and dispose of a practical detail suggested by these lighted windows.

If a strong premonition was on him that his master builder was dangerous, this steady-eyed young man whose tongue was so trenchant and whose mind so incorrigibly honest, whatever his deeds might be, — he was entirely without misgivings of this sort in the case of his overseer. Any notion that Hobbema would one day displace him and reign in his stead at the head of

the new religion, he would have dismissed as nonsense.

"I find that the builders are in trouble," the prophet said, as he seated himself ponderously in a massive slab-sided chair in Hobbema's library. "I have tried leaving them to themselves for this latter and less important part of the work, and I find them unequal to it. Comrade John confessed as much to me this evening."

"Comrade John?" The overseer affected not to know whom he meant.

"Comrade John, the master builder," said Stein, with no trace of impatience. "You brought me a message from him this evening."

Hobbema had never been able to discover who the master builder really was, though he had tried scores of times in just such little ways as this to trip him or the prophet into revealing it. Surnames were not as a rule made a matter of mystery at Beechcroft, though they had no place in the prescribed form of address. Still was it explicitly stated in what Chance had irreverently referred to as the "ground rules" that when a disciple sought the shelter of Beechcroft he might abandon, if he liked, the burden of his former identity and the label which attached him to it.

A respectable minority of others besides Comrade John had taken this course, but none of these worried Hobbema. His fine nose had caught a whiff of the one real mystery among them all and he was always sniffing at it.

"These new buildings," Stein went on, "are so far a failure. They are ugly, and I will allow no ugly things at Beechcroft. But from now on I shall make the completion of those buildings my first duty. We will turn this failure into a source of fresh inspiration."

He made an involuntary pause there. He would have liked, he had meant, to carry the jargon a little further, but a sudden weariness of it stopped him. The fact that the overseer suspected a good deal, and perhaps knew a little, was partly accountable for it, and Chance's suggestion that they stop lying for a while, still more. The quality of his voice changed, and he spoke brusquely. "I tell you this because I wish you to carry a message to the masters of all the guilds at once, to-night. At the regular hour of assembly to-morrow, the guilds will march to the temple to hear my words in the matter."

But by the next morning Stein was himself again. The jargon, so lifeless when he had tried

to talk it to Hobbema, had its old-time sonority back. His harangue to the disciples was in a fine vein of buoyant earnestness. He admitted, without mincing words, that the new buildings were a failure. His own guiding hand had been removed from the work. The builders, misled by pride in the triumphant achievement of the first stage of the work, had gone on vaingloriously in their own strength, without the aid of the true Beechcroft spirit. But the failure should be after all only a fall forward. To-day, with their prophet at their head, the triumph band was to assault the last fortress of Ugliness which reared its head amongst them. There could be no defeat. Beechcroft should be the oasis of the world, the flowering of its perfect beauty.

He gave out a hymn, upon this conclusion, "Onward, Toiling Soldiers," and while the organ was pealing out the opening strains he disappeared through the heavy curtains which closed the passage into the robing-room.

Near the end of the last stanza the curtains again parted, and the figure of the prophet again appeared, clad — the first time many had seen him so — in the simple working tunic of a disciple, and bearing in his hand a small silver trowel.

He pronounced the benediction, "Toil without weariness and achieve Beauty"—an injunction which must, for most of them, have taken on an ironical significance before night—and then, preceded by the overseer with his staff of office, he led the hosts of Beechcroft out to something they had never bargained for,—to a real job. For there was much weariness and precious little achievement of beauty that long summer day at Beechcroft.

But the important things that happened that day, and there were many, were not affected one way or the other by the attack of the triumph band upon the fortress of ugliness in the valley. A little scene between Hobbema and Hicks, for instance, which lasted not more than five minutes, counted for far more.

Hobbema, after leading the procession from the temple to the scene of the new work, had modestly sought the background, and here, in the same pursuit, apparently, he found the carpenter. The sight of the man always inflamed his anger, ever since the day of the saw-filing episode; now, fortified by Comrade John's assurance that all the workmen had been discharged, he hustled up to this one, intent on making short work of him.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded. "You have no right to that uniform nor to be loafing about Beechcroft. You were discharged last night."

"Go slow, there, little mister," said Hicks. "I worn't laid off last night. Not me. 'Oo told you that story?"

"All the workmen were discharged last night," said Hobbema, with a sarcastic staccato, better adapted to a class room than to his present auditor. "I presume you are one of them."

"You presoom wrong, then," blustered the other. "I'm J. Hicks. The boss won't turn me off, yet awhile."

"Whom do you mean by 'the boss'?" asked the overseer, sticking to his former manner. "Evidently you do not mean me or Mr. Stein."

"No, I don't mean you or Mr. Stein. I mean the real boss, the man who built those buildings up there." The carpenter was vaguely aware that he ought to stop here, but he had got fairly started talking and he could not stop himself. "I mean Mr. John Chance, that's 'oo I mean. And 'e knows 'oo I mean, too. I worked for 'im at Atlanta and he forgot me. But I didn't forget 'im."

Hobbema drew a step nearer and lowered his voice. "You know him?" he demanded eagerly. "You say his name is Chance? Are you sure? Do you know what his business is?"

"Didn't I tell you I worked for him at Atlanta?" The carpenter's voice betrayed a tolerant contempt for the overseer's ignorance. "'E's the man that builds things like this at the expositions." He waved his hand toward the upper valley, the temple, the lake, the whole Beechcroft miracle. "But he's done better than this. That Looking-Glass Park at Pittsburg was three times as big. 'Do I know him!'"

Hobbema's tact, which was the thimble-rigging sort, was blown clean out of adjustment by the violence of this revelation. He stared blankly at the carpenter a moment, and then gasped out:—

"And did Stein hire him to come here? Was he paid to do it?"

This question took Hicks quite beyond the tether of his knowledge, and the jerk reminded him that he was giving away something that was valuable.

"I don't have to answer your questions—I don't want none of your lip. I've got no time

for you. My business is with the boss. If you want anything, you can go to him."

It took the overseer an hour or two to get his intricate but cheaply made mental machinery to going again. When he did, when he fully comprehended the fact which explained the Beechcroft miracle in its entirety, the fact which proclaimed Stein a fraud and a traitor to the religion of which he masqueraded as the prophet, he was almost beside himself with excitement.

At last, after one and another of the fine-spun webs of intrigue he had been weaving all these years had fallen to pieces, suddenly, almost by clear luck, he found he had the prophet's feet in a net that would hold. All Stein's strength and subtlety would not avail him to escape from it. And he had found it in time; he was still Stein's heir. The mantle would fall on his shoulders, and on no others. All he would have to do now with the facts in his hands, after he had got Hicks to put them in writing, would be to give them to the world, and he would find himself seated on the throne that had been desecrated by an impostor.

And then the thought of Comrade Ellen occurred to him. What was that line of poetry

about hell having no fury like a woman scorned? Well, she had been scorned. Now he came to think of it, she must have regarded the rise of the new priestess with feelings as poignant as his own. And when she should hear an intimation of what was happening in the prophet's own home, when she had had repeated to her a phrase or two out of the scene Hobbema had overheard at Cynthia's, when finally she should learn what sort of man it was for whom she had sacrificed herself, when the weapon that would demolish Stein at a single blow should be unobtrusively slipped into her hand —

Yes, that was clearly the way to do it. She would have no qualmish fears. She would need no prompting, no urging on. Indeed, it was likely that she would take matters so completely into her own hands that the overseer would be able to keep an attitude of mild remonstrance against her doing anything. That would make his subsequent part in the affair much more dignified. He could be properly scandalized, at first over the charge itself, and later over the proven truth of it, perfectly free from the faintest suspicion of self-interest. And then, if the discovery should turn out to be nothing but a mare's

nest after all, he would be left just where he was to-day. He had not seen Comrade Ellen since the night of his encounter with Chance at her house, and he slyly assured himself that this fact would make his position with her all the stronger. He was a great man for finesse, was Hobbema.

He found her carrying a jug of water to a tired little group of toilers, and spoke to her with an air which he meant to make at once bland and authoritative. He could not come very near it though, could not even keep his lips from trembling.

"I have something to say to you which is for your ears alone. Will you come with me?"

She assented in a matter-of-fact, incurious way, and followed him; she asked no questions, and seemed perfectly indifferent as to what the subject of his momentous communication was to be. But when he had led her along a disused trail which mounted the steep side of the upper valley, out to the very outskirts of Beechcroft civilization, she stopped him.

"This must be far enough. You will be safe enough in saying anything you can want to say here."

"It was for you —" he began, but she cut him short.

"There is nothing you can say that I had not as lief you said before all the congregation. I have no secrets left. You, I think, have a good many. But this is a safe place to tell them, if any is."

A natural opening in the timber below the trail enabled them to look across to the abandoned construction camp, the shack, and the barracks where the real workers of the Beechcroft miracle had lived. She seemed utterly negligent of him and of his errand, as she stood gazing down upon the plain, work-a-day buildings below.

"It is about the man who lived there," he said, following her look, "that I wished to speak to you. You have shown your interest in him. I find that he has no right to be here at Beechcroft; that he is not a disciple at all."

He looked for some expression of surprise here, but saw nothing in her face that betrayed a spark of it; his own manner grew a little more impressive and pedagogic in consequence. "He is an architect, the builder of those vile amusement places which have been the disgrace of our great expositions. And the builder of a place

called Looking-Glass Park at Pittsburg has been permitted to desecrate Beechcroft!"

She was looking at him now, frankly interested, but still without surprise. Her reply, on the other hand, fairly staggered him.

"I knew he was some one like that. I knew he was here as a matter of business."

"You knew!"

"Oh, not as you mean," she said impatiently. "I never tricked any one into telling me his name. But I knew he was a real man, not the kind who come here for any other reason. I asked him why he was here the night you brought him to see me, but he wouldn't tell me. He couldn't, I suppose."

Hobbema found himself flushing a dull red. "I will not discuss that slur upon our brother disciples," he said. "It is beneath discussion. But what I wish to point out is that, by hiring him to come here to do this work for gain, Mr. Stein has shown himself a traitor to our principles. Do you understand? Stein — Stein is a fraud!"

Remote as they were from all hearing, the overseer trembled, stammered a little as he uttered those portentous words. But on the girl they

produced no more effect than the most obvious, casual comment would have done.

"Yes, he is a fraud," she assented listlessly. "That is not all he is; he is many things, some bad, some good. He is a fraud, sometimes, when it seems necessary to his purposes."

"But," cried the scandalized overseer, "he claims the credit, the credit and the high honor, of being the founder and the prophet of this great religion. Is he to go on — "

He would have gone on, for there was much on his glib tongue to say, but she was looking at him in a thoughtful, impersonal sort of way, that somehow made it impossible, that reduced him to an uneasy silence. The scene was not going just as he had planned it.

"I have been wondering," she said at last, "why you brought me here to tell me this; what purpose of yours was served by telling me of Comrade John, and why you thought it necessary to tell me that our prophet is a fraud."

She paused here, as again after a sentence or two, but these silences were broken by no speech from him. "Did you think that I would expose him? That perhaps I would add to this that you have told me, something more, some-

thing that would make his ruin complete? Well, I will not. If you want his place, you must pull him from it yourself."

This time the silence was longer. "Perhaps," she then said slowly, "perhaps you cannot do that. Perhaps you are afraid that you would merely expose yourself with him."

At that he burst into speech; he was breathless with anger. "Don't go too far," he gasped. "I warn you, do not presume too far upon my kindness to you. What you say is false as well as malicious. I can prove that I knew nothing of the matter."

"You mean that others would find it hard to prove that you did. I suppose so. At any rate, you preferred to leave the burden of making the charge to me, and to keep yourself free to discredit me if I failed. And, as I said, I will not do it."

He was not yet self-possessed, but he had his tongue and his lips under control again, and he managed to summon an ugly smile. "It is plain why you will not," he said. "You think that some day he will come back to you; that if you wait and watch your opportunity you can win his favor back again. Well, I assure you that

you cannot. He has your successor already chosen."

"Why do you say such things? Don't you know that nothing you say can hurt me? You can't think that I don't take you for granted, that I don't know that you are a coward and a liar. I know whom you speak of. But she is safe; she has a friend here who will not let her come to harm."

He was shaking a long forefinger in her face before she had done speaking, and his voice, when he found it, squeaked with rage.

"But she will be more to Stein than you ever were. Listen; listen to me. He means to divorce his wife. I found her packing to go away when I went to his house last night. And he means to marry this precious new priestess of his. I heard him tell her so, myself. That's all your chance is worth. And you have thrown away what I would have offered you. You're too late for that now."

"That is one insult the less," she said quietly. Except that she looked rather gray, even out here in the frank sunshine, one would have thought her perfectly composed. "Won't you please go away now? There can't be anything more that

you want to say. Or else stay here and let me go alone."

He looked at her with what was meant for scorn, and then, with what was meant for dignity, went off down the trail.

Comrade Ellen seated herself on a fallen log and let the grateful spell of utter silence and emptiness fold around her. It was plain, now that she had none to spy upon her, that the nerveless apathy with which she had listened to the overseer's revelations, had been real, not assumed. She sat there with no play of emotion whatever across her face, with no sign of life or energy in any line of her body. The fire had indeed passed over her, and had left not gold, but ashes. If there were left at the core of her a coal still glowing, her only wish was that nothing might ever come into her life again that would blow it into flame.

And yet, the reviving breath was blowing on it even as she sat there. The thought of Cynthia and of the trap the prophet had set for her feet kept coming to her mind again and again and from a dozen different angles. The girl had been much under her eye as well as in her thoughts ever since her dramatic arrival the day of the

miracle. Comrade Ellen, with her listless eyes, observed the everyday life of Beechcroft with more precision and detail, perhaps, than any other person in the colony. She had noticed how often, during those first days, she had seen Cynthia in John Chance's company, — she was glad to have that good, sane-sounding name to call him by, — and it was under the impression created in those days that she had assured Hobema that the girl was in no danger from Stein.

But now as she sat thinking about them with an interest which in spite of herself was kindling into eagerness, she remembered that she had not only failed to see them together once in the whole of the past fortnight, but that she had, at least once or twice, seen them obviously avoiding each other.

And at that, the idea that the girl might not, after all, be safe from the very fate that had overtaken her, surged up in her like a wave of giddy nausea, and left her with cold limbs and a clammy forehead.

Unless she herself interposed! She resisted that idea fiercely, at first. She, Ellen, was dead; there was no more duty upon her to try to thwart Stein's base desires than if she had been a veritable

ghost. And yet the breath kept blowing gently but stronger on the coal that till to-day she had thought dead, and her eyes grew light and eager again; and when at last she retraced the trail to Beechcroft, her journey ended at Cynthia's doorstep.

## CHAPTER IX

### GOD AND MAMMON

By half-past eight that same evening the Hicks-Hobbema intrigue had ceased to exist. The total net result of it was the sending of Ellen to Cynthia's doorstep. So far as the two principals were concerned, it was as if it had never been.

Hobbema's excitement over what the carpenter told him of John Chance's identity and former career had inflated Hicks to a most unwieldy and dangerous extent. He swelled visibly under Bill Hemenway's eye all day, talked bigger and louder and more recklessly every hour, until it became evident, both to Bill and his chief, that he must burst before night.

The crisis came just as the Beechcroft "angelus" which summoned the faithful to evening service was beginning to ring. Hicks took this occasion to threaten to "blow the whole thing up," attempted to hit Bill on the nose, and had to be knocked down and carried away into one of

the unfinished buildings while the procession of the guilds went by to service. When the procession had got safely inside the temple, Chance sent the mutineer under guard, up to the model room in the old shack behind the temple to cool off and get into a fit state to be talked to.

When Chance went up to him, a little before eight, the whole difficulty proved ridiculously easy to settle. Ten minutes' clever cross-examination elicited the fact that Hicks had already told all he knew to Hobbema. When he tried to bluster and wanted to know "what his information was worth," Chance laughed at him.

"The reason you ask that is because you don't know yourself," Chance told him. "You know two words, 'John Chance.' You don't know who wants to know them or who wants them to remain unknown. You don't know who'd be willing to pay for them or how much he'd be willing to pay. You've already given them away to Hobbema and you've an idea, now, that you can sell them to Stein, who knows more about me than you ever will. You've been turning this thing over and over in your head for weeks, and you don't understand it yet. Turning you loose with

a blackmailing proposition would be like giving a baby a stick of dynamite to play with."

Chance said it all good-humoredly, got him to forget the drubbing of the afternoon by the simple means of a good supper and a big cigar, and then stated his terms. They were plainly final, and they were more liberal than Hicks had secretly expected. Hicks wrote an explicit denial to Hobbema of all he had told him that morning. Chance dictated it and Hicks laboriously wrote it down in lead pencil. Then Chance packed him off to town on the evening train under escort of Jones, the purchasing agent, whose instructions were to buy him a second-class ticket to Liverpool by to-morrow's steamer and to give him twenty pounds in sovereigns just before the ship sailed.

Hicks went away in the best of humors. Then Chance enclosed a copy of the denial with a note of his own to Hobbema, stating that the matter as yet had not come to Mr. Stein's notice, and that if the overseer were satisfied that Hicks had made a mistake, there was no need that it should. If Hobbema wanted to go farther in the matter, however, no doubt Mr. Stein could satisfy him.

Chance understood the overseer pretty well, and was sure that this would hold him. Hobbema would hardly have nerve enough to move against the prophet with the evidence right under his hands, and for him to set about to get it in the face of Stein's certain knowledge of what he was about, was utterly out of the question. Hobbema, as a matter of fact, was cut out not to pull wires, but to dangle at the loose ends of them.

"Well," said Bill, as he and Chance were making their way down the valley after the transaction was complete, "I suppose it's easy when you know how. I didn't think you could stop him; he's such a fool."

"A fool's no harder to handle than anybody else if you go at him right. It was easier than I wanted it to be. I wanted something hard to-night; something I could get my teeth in."

"It's a funny sort of job," said Bill, ruminatively. "I had that feeling myself this afternoon. I wished Hicks had been a harder man to lick."

They walked on down the valley in silence for a while and then Chance spoke again, stopping in his tracks to give emphasis to what he had to say. "But we're going to put it through, Bill.

That's the only satisfaction we'll ever get out of this job. To put it through in spite of Hicks or Hobbema or Hell and the devil; to get it done and wiped off the slate, and then go back to Forty-second Street and start something that's on the straight, to get the taste out of our mouths. And the harder we have to work to get it done the better I'll like it."

Bill was a little embarrassed by the extent of this confidence, but he said, "I'm with you there," and they walked on again in silence. Nothing more passed between them until they had come near enough to Chance's cottage to see that there was a light in his sitting-room. "Somebody's waiting in there to see me: Hobbema, like enough. Good night, Bill; and thank you."

But his visitor was not Hobbema, nor Stein, nor any one else whom he had the least expectation of seeing; it was Comrade Ellen. He had entered the room in his swift, noiseless fashion, and had not only recognized her, but had noted the curious tenseness of her attitude as she sat in his big easy-chair, an attitude strangely at variance with her wonted languor, before she had time to rise.

She acknowledged his "Good evening" with a bow, stood looking at him eagerly a moment, as if anxious to speak, but lacking the words or the voice to make a beginning; then, turning away from him, walked restlessly to the window.

"I hope," he said, to take the edge off the silence, "that you haven't been kept waiting for me very long. I am usually at home at this time, but to-night —"

Still she said nothing; so after a moment he drew a little nearer. "I told you once, a good while ago, it seems, that if ever I could help you, I would. I'm very glad if you've taken me at my word."

At that she began speaking, and her voice had a kind of dry scorn in it. "A man came to me to-day with the knowledge of some facts which he said proved Herman Stein a fraud. He thinks, he has always thought, that I knew other things which proved him that and worse. He wanted me to expose him. I told him that I would not do it; that if he wished to wear the prophet's mantle he must pull it from his shoulders himself."

"He won't be able to now," said Chance.

"At least he won't dare run the risk involved in trying."

"With my help he could, with my help or with yours. And I refused." It was strange, almost uncanny, the way her voice kept its dry, lifeless quality through the next words she uttered. "It was not out of regard for the prophet that I refused. I would not turn my hand — so — to save him from death nor from torment. And it was not because I hated — hated the way you hate a rat — the man who asked me to do it. It was because I was, well, dead, and did not want to live again. I took life in my hands once and it hurt me, and I said I would never touch it again; that I would do no more to ruin Herman Stein than I would do to save him. That is why I refused. But why do you refuse? Why do you shield him?"

"He is my employer," said Chance, thoughtfully. "I hired myself out to him to do the thing he wanted of me. I knew then what I was getting in for, or I might have known. So I am as much of a fraud as he. And the only way I know to save a shred of self-respect is to stay loyal to somebody at least, through to the end. To do what I'd agreed to do and — well, take the

consequences, pay the price, no matter how heavy it was. And it's going to be heavy; heavier than you are likely to guess. As for the overseer, who has neither your reason nor mine, nor any other for shielding him, he will not expose him, either, after he gets the note I shall send him in the morning."

She moved about the room a little restlessly while he was speaking, and did not immediately take up the thread of talk when he dropped it. "I could say all I have come here to tell you in ten words. I wish that were all — I wish that I could get off as cheaply as that, but I am afraid that you would not understand. Have you patience to listen to a long story, a long and ugly one?"

"It won't tax my patience," said Chance. "And I'll do my best to understand and save you as much as possible. Tell me just what you think I need know, to be of real service to you —"

He caught the look that fled across her face. "Or is it you who mean to be of help to me? I've an idea I need it."

He nodded toward an easy chair, but did not force her to take it by remaining standing him-

self until she did; instead, he rather ostentatiously made himself comfortable, seating himself before his writing table and leaning his elbows on it. He did not move from that position, did not interrupt with a word or a look, all the time she was telling the story, and it took above an hour. For her part she remained standing through it all at the window, her face averted from him as if she had been looking out, though the black reflecting surface of the diamond-shaped panes gave her nothing but a dim, distorted vision of herself.

The story she told him was of Herman Stein's coming into her life, of his existence in it, of his going out of it, the three acts making up a completed tragedy. She spared nothing, paraphrased nothing, not a single ugly detail, but poured it all out, down to the dregs. She told it without excitement, without shame, without interest one might almost have thought. She carried it down to the end, down to the night when Chance himself had come with the news that her house must be moved from its isolation in the upper valley to make room for the Beechcroft miracle.

Through the whole story the figure of the prophet loomed big, formidable. Her own part

had been pitiful, but, after all, only a variant on the tragedy of the lives of many American women; an opulent soul whom life offered no investment for its riches, an easy prey for the plausible pretence that happiness can be manufactured, can be attained by direct pursuit, the ready dupe of the pedlers of patented and copyrighted soul-balm, of the promoters of the get-rich-quick religions whose smooth tongues are glib in the assurance that by a newly discovered process he who saveth his life may save it, after all.

But the prophet, in her narrative, presented a much more extraordinary figure. A sentimentalist, an epicure in passions, all the way from the height of religious ecstasy to the depths of downright bestial lust, pitiless as all such self-pampering egotists are bound to be, so far he was by no means a rare phenomenon. But in this, that he joined to this temperament the power to gratify its demands to the uttermost, that he possessed a powerful though cumbrous mind, a burly courage, a formidable will, in this combination of qualities he was rare indeed. His self-control was, up to a certain point, for an occasion, invincible. He made disciplining himself a luxurious sensation.

His semi-occult qualities which Chance had always been curious about were all the more impressive for being kept in the background. One of the things Ellen told, — told with a short laugh which sent a shiver over Chance's body, — was of seeing him cure "miraculously" by hypnosis a woman suffering from an hysterical simulation of a tumor.

"He never hypnotized me, I think," she said. "Except, of course, that I always knew he could if he should want to. It came to about the same thing."

And the end of the story was that Comrade Ellen, when she had served her turn, when she had given without stint, and he had taken all she had, was cast aside, empty, lifeless as a worn-out glove.

"That's not the end, though," said Chance quietly, after a little silence had fallen on her story. "Not the end, either for him or for you."

"Not for him, no. But for me — Don't you understand, after all? It isn't that I was wicked, nor that I'm unhappy. Good God, if only I could be! I'm burnt out, I'm ashes, I can't care, I can't *want* to care. That's worse than

being wicked, and dying, and going to hell, isn't it? To be just nothing at all."

"Up to now," said Chance, — he was drawing little meaningless pictures on his blotting-pad, — "up to now you've been telling me the truth. But that isn't true. You do care. You've cast a spell over yourself, hypnotized — if you like — yourself into the belief that you didn't care, and your real self is struggling now to rouse itself. It's partly succeeded. You came to me to-night because you cared, cared for yourself, or for me, or for some one else, enough to make you open a door that you thought you had sealed shut forever. It was a struggle, and you won it. Your real self won it."

His pencil was still busy; he did not look up. There was a moment of silence, and then: —

"It's true," she whispered breathlessly. "I did care. I — " The sentence ended in a great gasp. She crossed the room swiftly and stood before him, the table between them, and she leaning far over it toward him. Her eyes were blazing with excitement.

"I did — I cared this afternoon, when the overseer told me what he had spied and listened to find out, and what he hoped would make

me jealous of my successor. I told him she would never go the way I had gone because she had a friend —”

The pencil dropped from his fingers and he looked up, his eyes suddenly bright; his lips pressed together a little more firmly, and he drew a long, slow breath through his nose. You would have said, looking into his face, that he was almost smiling.

The rush of her words carried her over the silent interruption. “— a friend who was a real man, and who would never let her go to the hell I live in. But when Hobbema had gone away, the thought began to trouble me, and at last I went to her house. She was not there, and I set out to find her. I found her on the little terrace where she has been so often lately — You know the terrace I mean; you’ve been there yourself. I cared — I cared enough to find her. I told her to go to you and not to Mr. Stein. And when she said that he was willing to help her and you weren’t, I tried to tell her my own story. I cared enough for that. And when she would not let me go on —”

Chance frowned. “Would not let you?” he interrupted incredulously.

Ellen made a little gesture of impatience. "She had heard Mr. Stein's version of it. You knew he had provided himself with one. How I was a poor, weak-minded thing with a mania on a subject inexpressibly painful to him, and how, instead of having me locked up in an asylum, he kept me here and was kind to me— You must have heard it."

He shook his head. "And that's believed here?" he asked. "And that's the version of it she has heard?"

She nodded assent to both questions. "She was very kind to me, but she would not listen. And then I came straight here for you. I have been waiting here all these hours, afraid to go away for fear I shouldn't have the courage to come again. I—I am crying—crying—and I had no hope that I could ever cry."

She sank to her knees, her arms out over the table and her head buried in them, her body shaken in a paroxysm of sobs.

But gradually she became quieter, and the room grew silent except for the tall clock, ticking away sixty to the minute. Five and then another five of these crept away, and then Chance spoke.

"Can you help me a little more? Can you

tell me what it was that Hobbema heard and that you came to-night to tell me?"

"He overheard the prophet telling her that he meant to divorce his wife." She answered the question almost absently, as if it were not in the focus of her mind; and, still without raising her head, she added in the same tone: "He told me that, once, and said that I was to be his inspiration, and that he would marry me for the sake of the religion. That is what he has been telling her."

"And you think —" Chance began. The thing that startled her out of herself was nothing more than the trumpet-like timbre of his voice; he spoke as quietly as before, "—you think that there is danger that she will—do as he wishes?"

"She has decided; she decided this evening."

With a brusque movement Chance slid his chair back from the table and got to his feet. Ellen raised her head, but remained kneeling at the other side of it. She spoke quietly, but with her mind for the moment fully upon the subject, and very impressively.

"It is a good many days since she has attended a service at the temple. She has spent most of

her hours on the terrace where I found her this afternoon. But to-day, when she left me there, she went straight to the temple, just before the evening service. It shows that he has won. You may be sure he understood. It must have inspired him to see her there, and he must have made his victory complete. She will belong to him now, soul and — body, unless you can save her."

"No," he said. "I promise you that."

Her head drooped again between her arms; she was not crying, and Chance thought that perhaps she prayed. He went silently into an inner room.

When he came back five minutes later he found her in the same position, but she looked up immediately upon hearing his step, and smiled on seeing that he had put off his tunic and was dressed in the garments of the outer world. She rose to her feet and greeted him with a touch of color in her cheeks.

"It seems good to see you dressed that way; it's like getting a breath of fresh air. And I've never seen you so before."

But she was incapable of sustaining that manner for more than a moment. She clasped her hands tightly together to keep them still.

"You *will* save her! You won't let her become what I am. You'll tell her that I was a woman once, too. You'll tell her my story? Just what I have told you?"

"That is not the story I shall tell her," he said.

A shadow, deepening into a pathetic look of doubt, came into her face. "But it's true — isn't it true? That I told you to go and help her? That I really cared — that I've been crying? I haven't been just raving. You *did* say I'd broken the spell — didn't you?"

"You have broken more spells than one," he assured her very gravely. "You have saved her and me, and you have saved yourself. You never need believe the lie again, that you don't care."

She would not let him take her home, and he did not press the matter. Five minutes after she had gone he had Bill Hemenway on the telephone.

"Come down here and get a bunch of telegrams that you will find on my desk. They must go to-night. If the station is locked, break in and send the messages off yourself. I shall be out all night, so you needn't report to me till morning. You'll understand from the messages about what's going to happen."

## CHAPTER X

### THE PRICE

AT the first signs of the activity of a new day about Cynthia's house, Chance went to her door and knocked. The maid, who rather precipitately answered the summons, showed surprise both when she saw who the untimely visitor was and when she heard his errand.

"I wish to see Miss Cynthia," he said. He had used the word Comrade for the last time.

"But she has not come down yet —"

"I suppose not. I will wait. But tell her, please, that it is a matter of importance."

He walked past her into the living-room and found himself a chair. Ten minutes later he heard Cynthia on the stairs and met her at the foot of them.

It was not alone the clothes he wore that carried her back, in the space of a single quickly intaken breath, to the Paris boulevard on carnival day; to the man who had made it his job to save her

against her will from a peril she did not understand. She found herself facing the same eyes, eager, confident, imperious, that had challenged hers that day. And his speech made the memory still more vivid. It was as it had been then, abrupt, full of surprise, and prefaced by no word of conventional greeting or explanation.

"I asked you once — do you remember? — to give me your coat and hat, and to put on what I offered you in exchange. And you believed, without knowing me, that I was right to ask it, and you obeyed me. I want you to do something now in the same spirit. I want you to dress in the clothes you wore the day you came here, travelling clothes, and come with me. But get your breakfast first. I'll wait here for you."

Her decision was taken, her great decision, in reaching which she had looked to him for help and he had failed her, and she had been telling herself, ever since last evening, that nothing he could do or say now must be allowed to alter it or to raise a question in her mind. But as she stood there looking down at him from the first landing of the stairway, she could feel the blood flooding her cheeks and her heart pumping it more and more madly. She could not help that,

nor could she phrase her answer into the flat denial of his request that she had meant to make.

"Yesterday I could have done it," she said at last. "Yesterday — a good many yesterdays — I waited — I wanted you to come. But to-day —"

"It is not too late," he said. "I know. I have watched outside your house all night. And I've the same right to what I ask to-day that I had to what I asked of you in Paris; to what I asked when I was all unknown to you."

She looked at him a moment longer, then, nodding a brief assent, went back to her room. She pretended at first that she had done it in order not to be influenced too much in deciding whether or not to do as he asked by the sight of him there. But she threw that pretence overboard with a faint smile when she found that she had stripped off the Beechcroft dress and was hooking herself into the stiffer harness of civilization. The change took some time in spite of the nervous haste with which she attempted it, for her hair rebelled at the long unaccustomed pompadour, and the smart frock he had specified was not easy to get into without assistance. It

set her wondering why he had put her to so much trouble, why he had delayed, for so trivial purpose, the important thing he had to say to her.

But before the toilet was completed, she began to have an inkling. Beechcroft, the new religion and her devotion to it, the classic costume, tossed in a heap on the still unmade bed, suddenly began to seem unreal, fantastic, to the trim, tailored young beauty who stood looking at her so curiously from the mirror. That was why he had been willing to wait; he had foreseen this result, had counted on it. The discovery moulded her lips into a firmer line. It gave her something to resist with, something to hold her steadfast to her great decision, to counteract the effect of the old, dear memories of those hours with him in Paris, and of the newer picture, which she tried not to let her mind dwell on, of his vigil outside her house last night; last night which she had spent in dreaming and starting out of dreams, crying a little and wondering a great deal, trying to persuade herself that she was very happy.

Why he had thought it necessary to watch — against what peril, or what the great thing might

be which he was waiting now to tell her, were questions whose answers, curiously enough, she did not think of trying to guess.

They left the cottage in silence, and walked on so for a little way, but at the first turning from the main road, thinking she knew now where he meant to take her, she stopped.

"Not to the terrace," she said, rather breathlessly. "It's too late, I tell you. I was there yesterday, and—and I said good-by to it. I—I am never going back there again."

"No, not to the terrace," he said; and she, looking quickly up at him, surprised a wry smile on his lips, as if he had tasted something bitter. "The terrace is as impossible for me as it can be for you."

Those words, for the rest of the way they walked, she kept turning and turning in her mind, and at every turn they hurt her deeper. He had added: "It's to my house that we're going. There are some things there I want you to see;" but she hardly heard him, and remained apparently oblivious to her surroundings, even after he had ushered her into his sitting-room and got her seated in the big chair at the far side of his writing table.

He seated himself before it and rummaged for a few minutes in a drawer, getting some scattered papers together before he spoke. They were both rather pale. The tenseness of the situation grew through the silence and still more in the quiet, almost matter-of-fact tone in which he at last began to speak.

“That evening in the restaurant in Paris —”

It was almost like a cry from under the surgeon’s knife that interrupted him. “Don’t! It can’t be necessary to go back to that. That — that is buried.”

“No,” he said, still quietly. “That is the only thing that is not buried. The man who came into your life for a little while on carnival day and went out of it again without telling you his name or letting you tell him yours, who doesn’t know it to-day and never will know it, is the man who is talking to you now. It isn’t Comrade John, not the man who spent that wonderful day with you on the terrace, not the man, John Chance, he will turn into in a few hours more, when he’s done his last job here at Beechcroft. He would have no right to bring you here, no right to concern himself with you or with your world. But I, the — the Monsieur Jean to

whom you returned the borrowed clothes, I have taken another job, with the same authority I had for the one I undertook in Paris; that I find you again in a danger you do not see, a danger graver now than then."

He paused there for an instant and smiled at her, the same odd, engaging smile that she remembered across the restaurant table where they had eaten their dinner backward. It brought the color back into her cheeks and brightened her eyes with tears. "Can you keep that distinction straight?—hold on to it tight? For it is the whole point of the story. The man whose fraud betrayed you into danger and whose cowardice kept him from saving you from it—was Comrade John, himself."

He saw her eyes widen suddenly at that, with incredulous protest, and after a moment lowered his own, but his voice went straight on without a falter. "His real name was John Chance. He was a showman, a bit of a faker, but he had a knack of making buildings and landscapes into pictures that made the people who came to look at them feel gay and, for a little while, care-free. He built the Looking-Glass Park at Pittsburg, that you and I talked about that night

in Paris. Well, a man came to him one night last February in need of a miracle, a man who needed such a thing in his business. He had invented and patented a religion that was making him rich. It was built, like all the copyrighted gospels, on the lie—one of the oldest of all lies, I guess—that you can get something for nothing. He said you could achieve something worth while by toil without weariness, or sweat, or suffering; that you could be happy by just pretending hard enough that you were. He pretended to offer another looking-glass country—that is about the size of it—where you could find character and happiness ready-made. People are credulous in the direction of their hopes, and this pretence of his was making him rich, him and the men who had organized him and stood behind him financially.

“But he was ambitious. Where he was getting hundreds of thousands he wanted millions, and for that he needed the miracle. He wanted what would look like a demonstration that the religion would work. He asked John Chance to undertake it, and John Chance was ready to, for twenty-five thousand dollars. But when he found that the work was to be a fraud, that

he would be expected to help delude people into the idea that his work was the miraculous flowering of the soul of Herman Stein, — well, he didn't refuse to do it; he just doubled his price. He would do the work for so much, and he would cheat for as much again. He would dress up like one of Stein's dupes, and hide his name, and keep his models and working drawings and estimates out of sight, and at last stand by with a straight face when the prophet took the triumph he had made for him. John Chance agreed to do it all. He was under contract to do it while we were together — you and I — in Paris. He came back here and hired hundreds of men. He brought them to Beechcroft and worked them, night and day, worked them till they sweated and ached with fatigue. He built that temple under canvas, he dammed the valley overnight and made the lake, and when the day came for Herman Stein's miracle to be displayed, it was ready."

It was the thing he had meant least to do, letting that thrill of triumph in a difficult piece of work, consummately well done, creep into his recital. He had meant to keep the bald and naked outline of the fraud unobscured. But this thing, it seems, could be told in no other way.

It was part of the essential truth of the story and he could not keep it out. Equally involuntarily, as he concluded, he looked up at the girl.

The things he had been saying were calculated to pull her whole world down about her ears. They cut, one by one, all the roots she had been putting out into what she had believed to be, an hour ago, the true soil and nourishment for her life. But no consciousness of any such thing showed in her face. It was all alight. He lowered his eyes and clenched his hands as she began to speak.

“And it was yours, all yours? That lovely dream?”

His voice was harsh with emotion when he answered her, the voice of a mutineer to the iron discipline he had imposed on himself. “Yes, it was mine; every form, every color, every reflection. It was my dream and my work — there’s a clay model of it in the next room there. Do you want to look at it?”

She rose, nodding an eager assent, and he opened the door for her.

The first expression on her face as she looked at it was of a sort of puzzled disappointment. The thing was a small-scale clay model of the whole

of upper Beechcroft. The color looked dead in the gray, ill-lighted room, and the cluster of little buildings hanging halfway up the side of the narrow, gloomy, deep-cut valley had hardly a hint about it of the thing she knew. He read her look.

"No, that's not the way you saw it," he said. He switched on a warm, intense light, specially calculated to illuminate it, and then lifted a heavy plate of silvered glass which had been leaned against the wall and slid it into grooves prepared for it. "We floored the valley with a mirror, so. It was frowning before, and I wanted it to laugh and sing."

She looked at it in silence, and then again, in hardly more than a whisper, "Your dream!"

"Yes," he assented; "but it's easy to dream. It's making the dream come true that counts. It means facing the facts and taking them in both hands, even if they hurt. It means turning your dreams into mathematics and your mathematics into hard, rough, refractory materials. It was real work that did the miracle, not Stein's painless imitation of it. Look!" he commanded, and strode over to the model. "Down to here, all this upper group of buildings and the dam that

held up the mirror, we built — we real workmen, in sixty-three days. And then we discharged most of them, and dressed up the ones we kept in imitation of Stein's disciples. We let them work the way the disciples worked, six hours a day, and loaf whenever they felt tired. We paid them all along for ten hours' work. The expectation had been that the real Beechcrofters would work with them, but — well, to make a building, any sort of a building that will stand up, you have to put real work into it. And at last, two days ago, the men got demoralized to the point where they struck, and I discharged them all, packed them off to the city. And then I telephoned Hobbema to find Stein for me and send him up to meet me at the temple steps before dark." He heard the sharp, sudden intaking of her breath at that, but had no clew to it, and went steadily on. "When he came, I told him what I had done. I told him if there was a chance of saving his religion from being a laughing-stock, it lay in making his followers do a little real work, even if it hurt their backs. There wasn't much left to do, but it was work that had to be done. And yesterday, Beechcroft tried it. They accomplished, the whole of them,

about five men's work. And to-day — well, to-day, it's too late to matter."

To the suggestion in his last words she paid, for the moment, no heed. She leaned against the edge of the bench which held the model, still looking at it with half-shut eyes. Then, in a thoughtful voice which sounded scorn a hundred fathoms deeper than any more vigorous expression could have done, she quoted the prophet's benediction, "Toil without weariness and achieve Beauty." Then she turned upon him. "How could they go on believing it, with the truth right there before their eyes, all the time?"

"People are ready enough to believe in any easy thing. It's the hard thing they're incredulous about."

"And all the while, you — you kept a straight face. You went to the temple, you wore the clothes, and followed observances, you never betrayed the contempt you must have felt for all of them. Yes, once you did. You told me you supposed a person might find a real job, even here at Beechcroft."

She spoke the words in just the tone she used before, impersonally, with no hesitation. But the sound of them in her ears as in his was like

the solemn statement of a tragic theme toward the end of a symphony. The current of their talk had given them a little respite, which they had taken eagerly, and now it was over. The real issue, so far as they were concerned, was staring at them out of each other's eyes; there was no blinking it any longer. They had got down to the quick at last, where every stroke of the knife must hurt.

He stood gazing into her eyes, fascinated by the look he saw dawning there, bewilderment and then fear. He did not note her increasing pallor nor that she swayed about giddily, until he saw her clutch at the edge of the table to save herself from falling. "That light, up overhead, seemed to get into my eyes," she said, as he helped her into a chair in the other room. He offered to loosen her collar, and went around behind the chair to do it, but she told him it was not necessary. She would be all right in a moment. She had spoken, and when she went on it was still true, in almost the quiet tone of casual conversation. His attitude, there behind her chair, had brought something to her memory. "Put your hands on my shoulders, please," she said. "Things are all falling — falling in, somehow, the way

they were that day when you did it before." But his hands were not as they had been that former time, steady, magnetic, the one stable thing in her universe. They were shaking as if some spell laid upon him had palsied them.

"It is true," she began. "But you needn't stand there. Come around where I can see you. It is true, isn't it, that people are incredulous about the hard things? It took me so long to see what it all meant. To see —" Oh, if only her voice would break, that light, even ghastly voice, that made him shudder — "to see that all my little fool's paradise had tumbled down together. That what you had told me that day on the terrace was just a part of it."

"Not that, God forbid, not that! All the rest of my life may have been a lie, a cowardly lie, but that was true. That, that I loved you, that I will go on loving you so long as there is such a thing as I in earth or heaven, that was truth dug out of the very core of my soul. God knows I had no right to tell you, but God knows I told the truth."

"But that very day, that very moment, —" still that quiet, unbroken voice, — "you told me that you were just one of the disciples, like

the rest of us. That there wasn't any other reason than that why you were here."

"That was the moment I knew the truth; knew that I loved you. It was the lie that taught me."

She sat there unmoved, her eyes wistful, indeed, but her lips almost smiling. "You came back to me after all, after you knew my answer to you, and even then you denied me the truth, though I asked for it."

"I was a coward," he said. "I was afraid to give you up."

She arose quickly and stood looking straight into his eyes.

"That is not the truth, even now," she said sadly, but still with no trace of vehemence. "You knew there was nothing then that I would not forgive you; no, nothing that I would see a need for forgiving. I wanted your heart's heart, as I had offered you mine. And you knew; you were not afraid. You would have smiled at fear."

To that he had no answer to make at all, and after looking at him a moment, and seeing that this was so, she turned away from him. The action marked the end, not of her self-control, but of the curious numbness which had so closely

resembled it. She dropped back into the chair, her head cowering between her arms, her body shaken with sobs, like some frail thing smitten suddenly by a tempest. And when she could find voice, when in the lulls of the storm she could force her lips to articulate, it was to beg him to make her believe that what he had said was true, *make* her. He must give her something to cling to, for all the world was falling down.

He stood by through it all, until the storm should beat itself out, in a miserable silence, with no word to say, his mind running helplessly in a circular groove, to no purpose whatever. It was with no aid from him that she got control of herself at last and turned again to him.

She sat up straight in her chair and brushed her handkerchief across her eyes. "There!" she said. "It is buried now; it is all buried, as you said, except you, except Monsieur Jean, who helped me when I needed help so badly before. Will you help again, tell me what to do, and make me mind, before you go away without letting me tell you my name?" Her eyes met his bravely, and there was even a smile, an uncertain smile, on her lips. The sight of that smile, after all the agony he had been looking at dry-eyed,

brought a sudden rush of tears that blurred his vision of her. He wiped them away with both hands, frankly, but with a touch of impatience, as he had once wiped away the water that blinded him after his plunge into the pool. When she could see his face again, he was smiling, too.

"It's the same old story," he said, "I have to tell you just what I told you in Paris, and to make you do what you did then. This is a looking-glass country, and you must go away from it. I want you to take the morning train for New York" — he looked at his watch as he spoke — "and that means hurrying a little. But Bill Hemenway has a horse hitched up, and I will drive you down. You will have time to write a note to your aunt from here, telling where you have gone, and asking her to pack your things with hers and follow you."

Haste spoke more loudly in his manner and voice than in the words themselves, and she looked at him curiously. "I shall go away, of course," she said. "If you are in a hurry because you are afraid I shall change my mind about that — that I can be duped a second time, it is a groundless fear. Is there any other need for haste than that?"

"Yes," he said gravely, "there is — urgent need."

"Even in Paris, Monsieur Jean, you told me the reason why."

"And won't you go now without knowing?"

She thought a moment. Then: "No," she said. "I think I will wait for the reason. This looking-glass country can hardly be dangerous now that I shall not go blindfold."

"But the looking-glass is going to be broken to-day; that is the reason you must go now, quickly."

"Broken? To-day? I don't understand."

He drew a step nearer her, and spoke more swiftly. "John Chance is going to break it. He has sent back the pay he got for the work, for the work and for the fraud, to the man who hired him. And in this room, this morning, he has paid the rest of the price, paid what he had to pay before he could be free to do this thing. And now he is going to pull down the whole house of cards. He is going to do it within an hour. There will be no prophet and no band of disciples here to-night. There may be a mob, and there will certainly be one desperate and discredited man. Herman Stein, sitting amid his ruins, will

be dangerous whether the mob is or not, and he will be dangerous most of all to you. Now do you see? Will you go now, at once?"

She stood thoughtful, quite unmoved by the urgency of his voice, and repeated his words, "amid his ruins," under her breath. Then she looked up at him, into his face with a sort of eagerness, as if she were searching for something there, and not finding it. At last, turning away from him, she seated herself again in the big chair.

"We can't do it, either of us," she said unevenly. "I can't make believe you're—Monsieur Jean—and you can't make me mind."

"You're going to stay?" he asked, and then, with more emphasis, "You're not going to give Herman Stein another chance to talk with you?"

She nodded affirmatively to both questions. "Can't you understand why? I can't separate you into two men, and call the man who did wrong 'Comrade John,' and bury him, and call the man I love 'Monsieur Jean'—yes, I did love him, from that very first hour, from the very first minute when he smiled at me and made the whole world seem clean and fresh and happy all at once—I can't go on loving him and letting him make me mind. I thought perhaps I could.

If I could even have pretended to, I would have done it. But you see it was no use. And, now, don't you see that perhaps there are two men in Mr. Stein, and one of them honest, really trying and hoping for something. And I can't go away without hearing that man's story, too."

"There is more of his story that you haven't heard," he said. "I thought that this I have told you would have been enough —"

"It was enough," she interrupted, "enough to open my eyes, enough to keep me from ever being his dupe again. But suppose there is another man altogether, a man you don't guess at any more than I guessed —"

She had no need to finish, and saw as much in his face. There was nothing more to be said, by either of them. But still she did not rise.

He was quick to comprehend her difficulty. She felt she could not leave him so, leave him forever with no gentler valedictory, and yet to go beneath the surface again, to stand soul to soul with him for that last moment was a thing she lacked the courage and the strength to do. Here, at last, was a situation he was equal to, and something of his old look of whimsical command touched his eyes and lips.

"We needn't say good-by, then," he said. "I shall be here until I have finished this job of mine, and you won't be leaving before this afternoon. So we shall see each other again."

She smiled in grateful acknowledgment of his tact in sparing her, smiled a little tremulously, for that old, familiar look pierced, somehow. She met his outstretched hand with a pressure that could pass for merely friendly courtesy, said a word or two — she did not know just what — and was gone.

But neither his face, nor his walk, as he went back into the big room, nor the poise of his shoulders as he seated himself at his desk, none of them belonged to a beaten man. His slate was clean. He had sought no discharge in bankruptcy, but had paid every ounce of his debt. He was not beaten. For the first time, mind and soul and body, if need were, were free to fight.

The note he was writing to Herman Stein flowed out of his pen so easily that it hardly obstructed the current of his thoughts. He was thinking of his promise to Ellen. It was not defaulted yet, and it should not be.

This is the note he was writing to Stein:—

DEAR MR. STEIN:—

I telegraphed last night to Mr. James Heath, of the New York *World*, that I had something of great importance to tell him, and asked him to come down here this morning. He is due in a few minutes. When he comes I shall tell him all the facts regarding my contract with you and the interests backing you for the construction work that has gone on here at Beechcroft. I shall also tell him what further facts I have regarding your connection, financial and otherwise, with the Toil and Triumph movement. If you care to be present at the interview, I shall be very glad to have you. If not, I shall send Mr. Heath around to you as soon as I have finished with him.

I have returned the first instalment of my fee for the work to the source from which I received it, and shall send back the check for the second as soon as I have shown it to Mr. Heath.

Yours very truly,

JOHN CHANCE.

## CHAPTER XI

### CYNTHIA DISCOVERS THE WORLD

HERMAN STEIN was standing by his study window. One James Heath, of the *World*, had come and gone, — had come with a dry little note of introduction from John Chance, and a pocketful of affidavits and other documentary evidence of the great, the humorous, Beechcroft fraud; had driven off in the dusty old livery surrey without the slightest reflection of Stein's heat on his fat, cynical face. Hobbema, too, had come and gone, leaving a scrupulously kept set of books and an impression of impenetrable trickery behind him. With his wife and his luggage he was by this time well on his way to New York. Perhaps the papers would be on the street by the time he stepped off the ferry-boat. There was a certain Wall Street financier who would also read the account; the cynical reporter had spoken of bringing it to his notice.

Stein had been standing there longer than he knew. There were a good many things to think about. He had found money pretty tight lately, for one thing. Extensive building and landscape work can rarely be kept within estimates; and it was a disturbing thought that between Stein the triumphant overlord and Stein the beggar there stood nothing but a bundle of notes — judgment notes — and a few thousand dollars in currency, some of it in the steel room at the temple, the rest of it in Hobbema's safe. To set over against these notes he had only his prestige, his success, only what might be technically called his "good-will." What if this scathing, blistering exposure of Stein the sybarite, Stein the liar, Stein the cheap fraud, were, at a blow, to wipe out that "good-will"! What if a few hundred thousand admirers should overnight cease admiring and begin to laugh! There would be no dividends in that laugh.

The prophet's face could hardly now be called impassive. There were momentary sparks in the eyes, and the muscles on his jaws stood out; but the deeper lines about the mouth showed that the will which had ruled a thousand men — and women — as a king rules — was still doggedly

holding the command. The real change was in the man's body, in the muscles, and in the nerves which controlled those muscles. At last he found himself plunged into a struggle which would demand all his steadiness of hand, every ounce of his courage, and his big frame was responding to the call. All his reserves were rushing to the front. He was burning up energy now as he never had burned it before.

The tall mission clock in the hall struck five, and he turned. Chance's note was still crumpled in his hand, and he dropped it into the fireplace. Then, with a heavy sort of deliberation, he set off down the valley toward the little cottage that stood among the pines. It was now a fight to a finish between himself and John Chance. Quarter would be neither granted nor asked. And so he went to Cynthia first. .

She did not keep him waiting. He had little more than crossed the dim living-room, to the window that overlooked the brook, before she came down. The color had left her face, and she carried herself a little wearily, but there was a brave light in her eyes. If all her gods had crumbled, she would still walk forward in the dark. All this he saw, and he did not offer his

hand. He stood in the shadow, looking gravely into the troubled eyes.

"Tell me what disturbs you, Comrade," he said.

She sank on the window-seat, but did not lean back among the cushions. She wished he would take a chair, — it would make it easier to say what she had to say. Finally she spoke out: "I wish you would sit down, Mr. Stein." But he continued to stand, an erect, solid figure, and to look gravely, compassionately down at her.

"Tell me," he said again. "You are in trouble."

She glanced up at him, but her eyes fell away. She had not foreseen the difference his mere presence would make. One hand strayed to a cushion and fingered the cord that bound it. Then her slender fingers straightened a little. "I am wondering," she said slowly, "what I ought to think of people like my parents and my aunt — people who let a girl go where she likes, act as she likes, meet whom she likes. My parents knew I was not happy in our little city — they let me go to my aunt. I went because I wanted to find the looking-glass country where people don't live in rows of stupid houses and wear the

things that other stupid people think they ought to wear, and eat the things that other stupid people think they ought to eat. That never was real to me; it was not life, as I had dreamed of it." She paused, musing. "Yes, I had dreamed. It seemed to me then that I might find, somewhere, a country made up of real things and real people, where I could be happy. I was so tired of the little things. I wanted something that could thrill me — I wanted to feel real life flowing through me."

She looked thoughtfully out at the brook. The first twilight shadows were creeping out from beneath the pines. "I thought I had found it" in Paris — I wanted to stay there — and live, really live. And then the only person who had ever made me mind told me that I must go away. He said — I remember exactly — he said that there is no looking-glass country. He said that everybody has to mind, grown up or not, that when you're a child you're a part of some one else's job, and you have to mind that person because he's responsible for you, but when you've a job of your own, —" an oddly breathless quality had come into her voice, — "when there's a piece of work that you've got to mind because it's up

to you, then you're grown up. And he said that either way you've got to mind something, or you're on the way to everlasting smash. It frightened me when he said that — Paris was so beautiful — so real. It was carnival time — and I thought I was part of it — I thought I belonged there — until he frightened me that way. He said that people without jobs go to Paris because they think it is a looking-glass country, but that they get what is coming to them there just as surely as in a steel mill."

There was a long silence. He was afraid that she had stopped, but after a time she went on. "I told him I had no one to mind, and he said that I must get a job then. So I didn't stay in Paris. I let him send me away as if I had been a child." She smiled faintly, reminiscently, and a touch of color came into her face. Stein's great chest moved with a slow inhalation. But the thoughts that surged and clashed in the back of his mind were held in an iron leash. His reserves were at the front, but he had not yet thrown them into action. His last resource had not yet been drawn on; and as he studied that fresh young face, with the eyes that dreamed, and the mouth that smiled, even in the presence of golden

illusions that had turned to brass, and the color that came and went in soft, utterly charming little waves, and as he felt the power which this last resource gave him, the very blood in his veins and arteries tingled with the mad lionlike joy of it. She was playing so naïvely into his hands! He watched that unconscious half-smile fade out, and gave a very little rope to the exulting thoughts that were clamoring within him as a pack of hounds clamor at the kennel door. He must not let them out, — yet, — but they were there, and he was their master.

“Yes,” she repeated, “I let him send me away. I came back. And I found a job. I believed it was a real job — one big enough to live and die for — because he was here — he was a part of it — and I believed in him. And now he tells me that this is not a looking-glass country either — that it is a lie, like Paris. I could not believe it. He had to tell me that — that he was a lie himself, before I could believe it. And he told me — that — you —”

It was harder than she had foreseen. A sob came unexpectedly into her throat. She tried to go on, but could not get out the words that her fine spirit of fair dealing insisted on his

hearing, and from her. She tried to look out at the brook, but could see only a blur of light and shade. Another miserable sob shook her, and still another. A wild impulse caught her to run — upstairs — out doors — anywhere to escape this net of sinister circumstances which seemed to settle more snugly about her whichever way she turned, whatever she did or left undone. She covered her face with her hands, ashamed, yet angry that she was ashamed.

It was not pretty, this sudden glimpse of the truth. There was about it none of the dreamy beauty of the looking-glass land she had travelled so far to find. Chastened, saddened, yet after all oddly relieved, she saw at last with her own eyes that life is very real, and that ready-made happiness is not one of the facts which make it up. She was accountable for herself, it began to seem, for this empty, silly life of hers. No matter now what was to follow — she would simply try to face it as it came.

So Cynthia, sailing out of unreality, discovered the world. And then, suddenly, when she needed it most, the beginning of a clear path opened up in her bewildered mind, leading, not out, but a few steps in the direction which might ulti-

mately take her out. And all at once she heard again the murmur of the brook, and the evening song of the thrushes, and the faint human sounds from the lower valley. What Monsieur Jean had said was running clearly through her head. "Everybody has to mind — if they don't have to mind a person, they have to mind a thing they're responsible for." She could hear his voice, she could see his honest smile. She had not believed it then, because she had not understood it. She had merely accepted it, because his personality was stronger than hers. She had minded him, that was all. But now, with astonishing suddenness, she believed it, she saw it for herself. It was not, after all, a great discovery. And such as it was, the idea was still too young, too weak, to carry her very steadily or very far when the deep ruthless understanding of Herman Stein blocked the way, but it was a beginning.

Over her, while she swayed there on the window-seat, stood the prophet, with a look on his face which she did not find there when she dropped her hands to her lap and with new, quiet courage leaned back against the cushions and looked straight up at him. What she saw was a gravely

gentle face gazing down at her, so grave and so gentle that her doubts were shaken. And when the prophet spoke, the compassion in his rich, low voice seemed to pour out around her and envelop her.

"My poor child," he said, "my poor child."

"What," she faltered, "what am I to think? What am I to believe?"

He ignored her question. "I wish I could have spared you this trouble, Comrade. I should be happier if I had it in my power to make your road always clear, always easy. I would not ask it for myself, — I must fight, as I have always fought, — I must face a hostile, an ugly world, I must smile at misrepresentation. I must be patient with those who try to dishonor my name. That is the part I must play. I have committed myself to the truth, and this deluded world about us does not want the truth. They stoned the prophets. They shrink from the light. They turn on me and would destroy me. I am weak, I have but one defence, — the light I bear. They cannot stone that. They cannot put that to death. When they bury me beneath misrepresentations, when there is no way for me to turn, I cling to that light — and I know — I see."

He paused and drew a long, deep breath. She was sitting erect now, her hands clasped.

"Oh, Comrade," — his voice throbbed with feeling, — "I wish I could say to you that it is an easy road. But I never said that."

"No," she breathed, "you never said that."

"I told you what I have told no one else — that it might yet be my privilege to die for my faith — that it was a wonderful thought to me. If it is true that I would die for it, what manner of man would I be were I to shrink from mere suffering. No, Comrade, I face it proudly. The world misunderstands me — I smile. The world lies about me — I smile. The world laughs at me — still I smile. For I bear the truth, and the truth shall make them free."

His tense muscles relaxed, and he walked off a little way, and back again. There was now a gentle, luminous smile on his deeply shadowed face. "Comrade," he said softly, "I should have spared you this. You came to me with your troubles, and I have replied with my own. I am sorry." For the first time he permitted himself to sit on the window-seat, frankly facing her. And Cynthia was conscious of something friendly, of something

pleasantly human in the action. But she thought he looked tired.

"I am in trouble, too," he continued, "in great trouble. They are attacking me again — in a new way — but with all the old phrases — fraud, liar, false prophet! How many times must I face those worn-out words!" His face grew slowly grave again. "They all misunderstand me. I am not defending myself, Comrade. I — Herman Stein, the man — am not worth defending. I have made many mistakes; I shall doubtless make many more. You see, Comrade, —" again came that friendly, wistful smile, the smile of a lonely soul resigned to utter solitude, — "Providence calls on men to carry its banners. The men are poor things — they wander, and stumble, and fall. But the banners must somehow go on. I must carry my banner until I fall. I have hoped that you would go forward with me, and that when I fall you would snatch it from my hand and press on. Perhaps — perhaps I was wrong to hope for so much. You are young. You are very beautiful. The world still looks fresh and bright to you. The things of this world are still real to you." He leaned a little forward. "Comrade, you are

still dreaming. You have not yet made your choice."

There was a long silence. Finally the prophet got to his feet. He was not smiling now. His weight seemed to rest heavily on his frame. He looked older. She glanced up inquiringly.

"I must face them," he said. "But first I must go to the temple. I can see the light more clearly there. I must see it. Without it I shall be beaten, for without it I shall be but one man against the world — against the laughing, jeering world." He tried to smile again, "Come, Comrade," he said. "Your time has come, too. You must face your decision as I face mine. Come to the temple. We will seek the light together. I will find it, for I must. And you must find it if you are to go on the way you have chosen. If it does not come to you, then we shall know, you and I, that my path is not your path."

He waited. She looked out at the brook. She was surprised to observe that the twilight was already deep in the valley. Then she turned back to the dusky room and slowly rose. With a sort of defiance she put on a walking hat; and together they left the cottage and walked up the valley road past the dwellings and the shops.

The way was heavily shaded, and few of the passers-by recognized them or noted her worldly dress. They ascended the steps by the dam, and paused at the beginning of the promenade; for before them spread the Beechcroft Miracle, softened in the shadow of the hills to a mystery, and crowned with a wonderful rose and gold sky.

They paused again within the temple. It was dark in there, but the faint evening light that floated in through the tall windows served to suggest the lofty vaulting of the roof. She followed him down the aisle. She could just make out the bulky outlines of his figure. At the side of the platform she stumbled, and he turned and felt for her hand; then, leading her, he mounted the steps, crossed the platform and the robing room behind it, with his free hand unlocked a door, and led her forward. They stopped and she made an effort to withdraw her hand, but his hold tightened. His hand was trembling and she could hear him breathing heavily. Suddenly she was frightened. She made another effort to release her hand. Then she felt that he was drawing close to her, and she sprang back and struggled with him.

"Wait — Cynthia," she heard him saying; but she struggled the harder. He was hurting her now. And then his grip relaxed, and she staggered back a little way, against a wall, and leaned there catching her breath, all aghast at what he had done.

There they stood, neither seeing the other, neither speaking. Finally she heard the door close. He was moving about apparently groping for something. Then came the click of a key, the room was flooded with light, and she was closing and opening her blinded eyes and shading them with her trembling hand. She did not at first take in the details of this comfortably furnished, windowless room, with its leather chairs, its desk and table, its steel safe in a corner, for before her stood Herman Stein.

It was not Herman Stein the prophet; something had gone from him, something that seemed to mark the difference between triumph and defeat. This was a beaten man. The story of a lost battle was written in every line of the solid face, in the set of the broad shoulders. It was not that he had been unfair with her; he had been unfair with other women, and had left them coldly behind as he climbed; it was that the

hounds had slipped their leash and had got away from his controlling whip. His self-mastery had failed him. He knew it. He knew that he had lost his grip. And he knew that that grip was all he had.

He was looking at her — not squarely, but with eyes that told a furtive story. Her breath was coming back, and with it the knowledge that it was she who commanded the situation. No matter what he might say or do, no matter even if he tried to keep her here, she now saw through the mask, and he knew that she saw. He was waiting, now, for her to speak. There was nothing that he could say.

“I think —” her voice was less steady than she had expected — “I think you had better open the door and — let me go.”

His eyes wandered away, then back.

“Will you please open the door?”

He cleared his throat. “You see what has happened to me — how you have shaken me. Has it occurred to you to be a little sorry for me — Cynthia?”

“I have asked you to let me go.”

“And I can’t do it — I can’t. I am in trouble. My position is attacked — my credit is threatened .

— it may be that to-morrow I shall be just another exploded prophet. In the face of all this I can think only of you. Everything else fades when I think of you. I want only to be with you, to try to make you love me.” She looked away and shivered at this. “I can make you love me. You don’t know me yet, Cynthia. They may call me a prophet — they may call me a fraud — whatever they like. They are wrong.” He was little by little regaining a part of his self-command. “They are wrong, Cynthia. I am not a fraud — I am not a prophet — I am a man; and I can make you love me. I can’t stay here now. If I am to save anything I must go down there. But I will be back soon — I want you to wait for me here. We are not through yet. I won’t let you go until at least you know me.”

What was the source of this dogged look on his face, of this dogged note in his voice! It was unlike anything she had ever seen in him. It was not his old mastery, but neither was it the abasement that had immediately followed his loss of that mastery. He was thinking of something. There was another string to his bow, and he had pulled himself together with the deliberate purpose of employing it. And while

she looked at him, her heart sank. She reached out to the back of a chair and steadied herself.

"Mr. Stein," her mouth was dry; she moistened her lips, "will you please let me go?"

He was still looking at her, the man Stein. Then, suddenly, with a mechanical sort of determination, he opened the door and started out. She rushed after and got her arm through before he could close it, and clutched the outer knob.

"Let go, Cynthia," he said. "You will hurt your arm." And he waited, holding the door firmly while she struggled to open it.

She tried to call out, but her voice failed her.

"Let go, Cynthia," he said again. Suddenly he reached down, worked her fingers loose from the knob, pushed her back into the room, closed the door, and turned the key in the lock. And then, for a moment, he stood motionless. She was working at the knob from the inside. There was something uncanny in the rattling, clicking noise, the only sound that broke the gloomy silence of the temple. He had lost utterly. And how easily he might have won, if only he could have kept his head, if only he could have continued to play the game. She might be waiting there now, willingly, for her prophet to return.

Then Herman Stein's teeth came doggedly together. Yes, he had still another string to his bow. There was a chance that it might succeed. He had not used it of late years, — perhaps he had lost his old facility at it, — but it had worked before. It would work again. It *must* work again. He walked slowly through the robing room to the platform — and paused there. The spacious temple — dark, cool, restful — soared above and about him. It was *his* temple. It had marked *his* triumph. It steadied him now. He was glad of that. He needed steadying. After a moment he felt his way heavily down the steps, and let himself out of the building by the small side door.

. . . . .

The lower valley was astir. Men, and women as well, were moving about from house to house. It was not a placid Beechcroft now. The disciples were no longer a humble community, obedient, characterless; there were leaders among them. The air was electric with rumors and questionings; startled, bewildered minds were communicating in some new, wireless way. Dismay and irresolution were resolving into half-formed purpose. Far away down the road, below

the last house in the settlement, some sort of a conflict was taking place, and men with strange hoarse voices, of an unmistakable city timbre, were shouting.

A straggling band of disciples came hurrying up the road, thirty — forty — fifty of them. Stein hid in the brush and let them surge by him. They were talking in excited voices, and out of the confused clamor emerged his own name, not once but repeatedly.

He took to the back trails after this, hurrying to his house. He crossed the lawn and mounted the steps. There were lights within. Two men stopped him at the door, roughish men, from the outside world, with broad shoulders and bearded faces.

“Hold on there,” said one, shortly, “you can’t go in.”

His comrade touched his arm. “It’s the boss,” he said.

“Oh, you’re Mr. Stein, are you?”

“Yes, I’m Mr. Stein. Who are you? What do you mean by this?”

“This means that the sheriff has seized your property, Mr. Stein. You can go in if you like, but I warn you that we may have to search you

when you come out. That's our orders. We're here to see that nothing is carried off the place."

"But you have no right yourself to enter," cried Stein.

"Perhaps not. But you'd better not try to bring anything out without a court order."

Stein turned and descended the steps. Standing a little way off on the lawn, were five or six men in tunics, all looking his way. As he approached, he made out the diagonal band of the Beechcroft guards across the breast of each. He peered narrowly at them, and was relieved by their manner.

"We're waiting for your orders, Mr. Stein," said one, stepping forward. "We didn't know just what we ought to do."

Stein drew a long breath. "Where are the rest of the guards?" he asked.

They looked at one another. "I'm afraid," said the spokesman, after a brief pause, "that they aren't with us. Some of them got excited, and ran with the crowd." He hesitated, then added eagerly, "But a few of the boys are down yonder driving off the newsboys. They'll be back — and we can trust them."

Stein was thinking rapidly. What was it that had stirred all Beechcroft to this pitch? Certainly not the exposure. That might wreck his credit, but it could hardly take these fools away from him while they were still here under his influence. It hardly seemed that even the presence of the court officers could accomplish that. No, it was something else, it was some unexpected spark that had found lodgment in the tinder of their brains.

"Tell me," he said brusquely, "what has happened?"

Again they looked at one another. "Why, it's like this, Mr. Stein. Everything seemed to come at once. The newsboys got in with their papers, and the deputies came and seized your place here, and Mr. Hobbema's, and right on top of that somebody remembered that Mr. and Mrs. Hobbema had gone away this afternoon, bag and baggage. And they want to know what — well, what has become of all the money they've turned in here. We've tried to straighten it out, but they act like crazy people." The spokesman passed his hand across his eyes. "It's all took place so quick like, Mr. Stein, that I guess we don't any of us quite understand it. Some of them have

gone down to the station. They said they'd see that you or Comrade John didn't get away like Mr. Hobbema."

There was a moment's silence, then a light flashed into Stein's eyes, and he spoke quickly and clearly. "You," he pointed at the spokesman, "go to those people and tell them that I am here to look after them, and that I propose to stay here. Tell them that I must go up to the temple, but that I will be back shortly. But tell them they are right about Comrade John. Don't let them touch him, or harm him in any way, but see that he doesn't leave the valley until he has accounted to me. Now I want the others of you to go to the temple—at once. Take possession inside, four of you at the front doors, one at the side door. Don't let anybody enter,—the sheriff, Comrade John, anybody. Be as gentle as you can, but keep everybody out, whatever happens! Remember this; the sheriff's men have no authority to enter; they can only guard outside to see that nothing is removed. Keep that clear in your mind. If they set guards *outside* the doors, you will be guarding *inside* the doors. *And don't let Comrade John get in! Watch him!*"

They waited only long enough to make sure that he had finished, then they darted off to obey him. Stein looked after them, then paced the lawn. What was that about Hobbema's place? Oh, yes, the sheriff had seized it. And most of the money was there! He clenched his fists as he walked. Suddenly he stopped, glanced about him and up at the officers on the porch, then hurried off, through the darkest of the shadows, to Hobbema's house. It was true. An officer was sitting on the top step of the veranda; another was standing in the rear. He stood under a tree at the roadside, this man Stein, and watched them. It was a clean job. Everything had been foreseen. Everything of the slightest value to him in this Beechcroft of his — books, documents, letters, cash — had been taken from him at a stroke. There was nothing personal in evidence, nothing vindictive. There was no one he could strike; there was no one he could even talk to. The cold hand of the law was clapped on Beechcroft, that was all; and Herman Stein, lurking like a fugitive in the shadows at the roadside, felt the chill of it on his heart.

He heard light footsteps, and started. A half-grown boy slipped up to him. "Paper, Mister,

— paper?" came a hoarse whisper, "all about Stein a fraud!"

Stein looked down at the boy with a face that was working savagely behind its veil of darkness. Then he snatched the bundles of papers from him, and with a "Damn you — take that!" struck him an ugly blow in the face. The boy staggered back, caught his balance, turned and ran swiftly and silently down the road.

Stein remained for a moment standing in his tracks. His work was still to do, the fight for his throne and his followers still to be fought. It had been to come out and fight that he had left Cynthia in the steel room. But the thought of her there, still unmastered, obsessed him. Cynthia first. She must be his before he could strike a blow for the others. When she was safely won, then he could come out and show himself a man before these fools who yesterday had worshipped him. He turned abruptly and strode back to the temple. As he had half expected, there were deputies here, too. They stood outside the big open front doors. But from the corner of the building he caught a glimpse of a white tunic just within. At the side door he found a solitary deputy, who accosted him with a —

"Stop! You can't get in here."

Stein slipped his key into the lock. "I can and will," he said.

The deputy yielded to his authoritative personality. "Very well," he replied. "I suppose you're Mr. Stein. But I want to tell you this: We don't like the looks of those guards of yours around here. If they try to interfere with us, there'll be trouble."

"They won't make trouble unless you exceed your authority," said Stein shortly, "as you tried to do just now. They know their business." And with that he entered the temple and locked the door after him.

. . . . .  
There was a murmur of voices outside John Chance's house, and a loud knock at his door. He opened it. Three men stood there, evidently spokesmen for the excited rabble that was clustered about the steps. One of them wore the uniform of the guards.

"Well," said Chance, shortly, "what is it? What do you want?"

It was the guard who replied. "We want to know what you plan doing next."

"That's a strange question."

"No, sir, not strange. We want you to understand that you're not to leave the valley until we're ready to let you. You may as well know that you'll be watched."

"Oh, that's it, is it! Well, then, watch me all you like."

Chance went in and shut the door. But he waited only until the crowd had straggled away whence it came. If things had come to this pass, it was time to act. No matter what Cynthia might feel or think, no matter what she might say, it was time to get her away. And so, with a mind that was curiously cold and clear, with his love, his pride, his sense of degradation thrust fiercely behind him, he went straight to the cottage among the pines. And two men followed him at a distance.

She was not at home. Her Aunt Augusta met him at the door and in her fluttering futile way told him that much. Where was she? Somewhere with Mr. Stein, — at least, she had gone out with him at early twilight, wearing one of her city dresses, even wearing a hat. Chance tried Stein's house, but was convinced, at a glance, that she was not there. All this was baffling. He walked briskly down to the road, and snapped

his fingers meditatively. Comrade Ellen — she could help! He could ask her, anyway. And glancing back at the two shadows behind him, it occurred to him that she could help in more ways than one. “I can’t give my parole to those blockheads,” he thought, “for I might have to break it any minute.”

He found Comrade Ellen the one apathetic person he had seen this night at Beechcroft. She came to the door with a half-completed basket in her hand and with a long string of raffia coiled around her shoulders.

He entered. She closed the door and leaned against it. “You need me,” she said. “What am I to do?”

“Go to her house and wait there until she comes. Then stay with her. Don’t let him be with her alone.”

Ellen looked straight at him, and voiced the question that was in his own mind: —

“Will she come?”

“I don’t know. I am trying to find her. I shall feel easier if you are there. But wait — five minutes. Draw down your shades, please, — all of them, so that no one can see in. Is there a light in your kitchen?”

“Yes.”

“Put it out, please.”

She did so; returning to the living room she encountered him in the dark passage. “Let me out at the back,” he said, “very quietly. Careful about making a noise with the door. Now, let me look around —”

“Wait,” she whispered. “Where are you going?”

“To the old camp on the mountain. My men are there, packing up. I need them.”

Then he was off, slipping out among the weeds and undergrowth like an Indian, and down the slope to the brook, and across the brook, and up the farther bank, scrambling through brier patches, stumbling over logs — to the other road.

Ellen looked after him until his dark shape had blended with the night. Then she softly closed the door and returned to the living room. Her little house was empty again.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE MAN AT THE DOOR

CYNTHIA was sitting in a big leather chair beside the roll-top desk in the steel room. This was a farther corner of the room, twenty feet or more from the door. The desk was closed. The centre of the room was occupied by a table which was six or eight feet long, and was mounted on casters. At one side of the table, midway down the room from the desk, was a high-backed mission chair. A safe stood beside the desk and immediately beyond the safe was a stationary wash-bowl with running water. From the ceiling an insulated wire hung down and lay in a loose coil about the drop light on the table.

When Stein opened the door, entered, closed and locked it after him, and pocketed the key, she merely turned her eyes in his direction. But if her manner suggested indifference, what she saw in his face sent a tremor along her nerves.

He was not dogged now. Some part had returned of the mastery which had made him formidable. If he was at bay, if the prophet game had been played and lost, the man had no notion of surrendering.

He came deliberately around the table and stood before her. She closed her eyes.

"Cynthia," he said, "look at me."

There could be no doubt that he had regained control of his voice. It was low, cool, compelling. He evidently had a definite plan in mind which he meant to carry out. She kept her eyes shut, and her fingers gripped the arms of the chair.

After a moment of silence, she became conscious that he was bending over her. Then she felt a light, firm touch on her forehead and eyelids, and shrank back into the corner of the chair. But she could not get away from the touch of those fingers. She moved her head from side to side; the fingers moved with her.

"Mr. Stein!" she cried, "take your hands away!"

His only reply was a gentle pressure on her temples. She caught his wrists and tried to pull them away, but she could not move them at all. She could hear his calm, regular breathing.

This was not the broken man who had turned the key on her an hour earlier. This was an inexorable, irresistible personality. Thoroughly frightened, still gripping his wrists, she opened her eyes. There his face was, a little above hers, but close to it, and his eyes were looking straight into hers. And once she had permitted him to fix his eyes on hers she found it difficult to turn away or to shut her eyes. The outlines of his head blurred and wavered. He seemed to grow bigger and farther away, but his bright, steady eyes remained as a focal point for hers, until they became the only real things in the room.

So far this was satisfactory to Stein. But the task he had set himself was not an easy one, and he went about it with deliberate method. Very slowly, steadily holding her gaze, he drew back his hands, took a firm hold of hers, and lowered them to the arms of the chair. With the same slow, soothing motion he raised his own hands again, placed his thumbs upon her forehead, his forefingers on her temples, and, accompanying the motion with a sudden pressure, brought his eyes an inch closer to hers, staring straight into her pupils, and through them. Everything was slipping away from her now. He was looking

into her mind. He knew what thoughts were there. He was forcing himself, steadily, little by little, into those thoughts. Her utmost struggling to resist him resulted in nothing more than a trembling of the eyelids while she hung on that overmastering gaze. Then, accompanying the sound of his voice with a barely perceptible stroking motion on her temples, he began to talk. And in his voice, as in the movement of his fingers, there was a gentle, monotonous rhythm. It was like a lullaby. Those big, luminous eyes filled the slumbering mind.

"Your right hand has become very heavy, Cynthia," he was saying. "It is like lead. You can't lift it. Try — try — you can't lift a finger." He was watching her intently. He saw the muscles of her upper arm and shoulder straining while the hand lay passive on the chair arm. This was satisfactory, so far. But before he dared venture on the very difficult experiment which was in his mind, he must get perfect control, not only of the muscles, but also of her five senses, carefully, one by one.

"Your hand is growing lighter, Cynthia. Now it is light as air. You can't hold it down. See! It rises — now it is heavier again and it

falls. But what makes it so cold? It *is* cold. It grows colder — like ice — it hurts you — now it is growing warmer — better — much better — now it is very comfortable.” He carefully noted the little sigh of relief that passed her lips. He was succeeding; there was no doubt about it. He took off her hat and laid it on the table. Her beautiful face, under the massing, waving, straying charm of her hair, was passive beneath his hands. Her eyes, opened to their full width, reflected every slightest motion of his. He tested it; he moved a little to one side; her eyes followed his automatically, without perceptible wavering of the lids. He tried a more difficult test, quietly removing his hands from her temples and deliberately turning his back on her and looking at the clock on the table. For one full minute — a very long minute — he waited before he turned. But her eyes had not changed; they were still fixed on him.

He unlocked the desk, threw back the top, and picked up an empty glass ink-well. “You do not feel well, Cynthia,” he said. “Your head aches.” Her brows contracted at this. “Take these smelling salts, Cynthia. They will relieve your headache. When you have smelled them

you will feel better." She reached obediently for the ink-well and sniffed at it, and almost at once her brows relaxed again.

"Yes," he went on. His voice neither rose nor hastened. It ran on in the same soothing monotone. "Yes, you feel better — your head does not ache any more. But wait! — Listen, Cynthia — the temple bell is ringing. It is beautiful. Listen!"

She sat upright, her lips parted a little; and an expression of childlike pleasure came into her face.

So far, so good. The only really difficult test remaining was that of vision. With that same sudden fixity of gaze he had at first employed, he gave an abrupt start and bent down over her, and looked into her eyes. The response was better now. She started, too, as if the nerves and muscles of her body were physically controlled by his mind. After a moment he moved aside, and without taking his eyes from hers, said:—

"Mr. Hobbema is standing just in front of you. You can see him plainly. He is speaking to you. Say 'How do you do, Mr. Hobbema.'"

Stein reached back and gripped the edge of the table. The veins stood out on the back of his

hand and there was sweat on his forehead. His frame seemed to be drawn compactly together, as if for a mighty effort. For she was looking at him, not at the imaginary Hobbema.

Then he said again, in a cold, even voice: "Mr. Hobbema is standing just in front of you. Speak to him, Cynthia."

She slowly turned, and a look of recognition came into her face. "How do you do," she breathed. Then she settled back in the chair, and again rested her eyes on his.

Stein stood erect, looked straight down at her, and drew in one deep breath after another, until his arms hung easily at his sides and his head was clear and cool. It had really been absurdly easy. And the rest of it should be still easier, for there was need for little more than a clear wit and determined action. As he looked at her — leaning back in the chair, more than ever bewildering now that she seemed little more than a part of his mental being, he could not realize that at last, even if he could not have her heart, he was to have the shell of her. It was, perhaps, just as well that he could not realize it. Once this evening he had lost his self-control, and he had since been fighting the fight of his life to regain

the lost ground. There would be time enough to look at her later on.

He took from a compartment in the safe several bundles of currency and counted them. The sum was not so large as he had hoped, but it would have to sustain them until he could work out a new plan of life in some other corner of the world. He made up the bills into a number of small piles, wrapped about each a strip of paper and gummed it with mucilage; then he gave it all to Cynthia.

"This money is yours, Cynthia," he said. "There are men at the door who would take it away from you if they knew you had it. You must hide it from them. Hide it in your dress." And he walked across the room while she obeyed.

He next drew up a chair and sat directly facing her for the final test of his power. "Cynthia," he said, "the back of your chair is too warm to be comfortable. Sit up straight, and you will feel better." And when she had obeyed, he leaned forward, placed his finger tips again on her forehead and temples, and fixed her eyes again on his with that same quick little jerk of his own, as if he were establishing some sort of physical communication between her eyes and his.

“What I am going to tell you now, Cynthia,” he said, “is the thing you want most to know.” He was speaking very slowly, enunciating each syllable with exaggerated distinctness. “You are not happy in this room. You have been here a long time. The air is close and heavy. It oppresses you. You would like to be out in the open air — among the trees — by the lake — where you can feel the fresh night breeze — where you can see the stars in the sky. I am going to tell you how you can manage it. You must listen very closely, because there are rough men in this building who would like to take your money away from you and confine you here. You must do exactly what I tell you to do. Listen, Cynthia. I am going away first. I will slip out at the side door of the temple. You will stay here alone, and keep very quiet and let nobody know that you are here. Very soon I shall telephone you.” He reached across to the desk and drew out the instrument to where she could see it. “When you hear the telephone bell ring, you will be awake. He bent forward, looking even more intently at her. “Remember that, Cynthia. Keep it clearly in your mind. When the telephone bell rings, you will be awake —

you will be yourself. And then you will answer the telephone and you will act exactly as I tell you then. You will listen to the voice in the telephone, and do exactly what that voice tells you to do. If you wish to be free, if you wish to be happy, you will obey the voice in the telephone. And remember — fix it in your mind — when the telephone bell rings, you will be yourself.”

He got to his feet, and walked slowly and thoughtfully to the farther end of the room. He could not wholly control the elation that was sweeping over him like a wave, and so he allowed himself a moment of relaxation. The plan would work. He could change his clothes in the robing room. The deputy who would see him pass out at the side door — who would, perhaps, go so far as to search his person — would not be likely to see Cynthia go out at the front. And what a lucky chance it was that he had found her in city dress! Even if there should happen to be communication between the two sets of watchers, they would hardly detain her. She would be free to go where she willed — or where he willed. And by that time he would be out of the way. They could not trace his movements, at night, on that wooded hillside. He would meet her

at the roadside, and take her over the ridge to the railroad. It might be best to catch a train going west, in order not to risk passing the angry watchers at the town below, and to connect at the western end of the branch railroad with one of the lines that entered New York by another route. He paced slowly back and forth by the door. He would be himself in a moment. It was important that he steady himself now, because it was advisable, before leaving her alone, that he carry her still farther into her sleep in order that all possible memory of the post-hypnotic suggestion he had employed be effaced from her mind.

And then, without an instant of warning, Stein's house of cards fell, a ruin, to the ground. He was still walking the floor, separated from her by the length of the room and by the long table. She was lying back in the big chair by the desk, to all appearances asleep. No one of the night sounds that filled the outer air entered this steel chamber. The soft fall of Stein's sandals on the thick rug was all that broke the silence.

Into this silence, with a suddenness that brought Stein up short, startled, caught with all his faculties aback, like sails that flap useless against

the masts — came the sharp, business-like ring of the telephone call. And he stood there, his fists clenched, his face working, wearing his mind slowly around to meet this new danger, while Cynthia gave a little start, looked about her with a puzzled expression, and then, in an oddly matter-of-fact way leaned forward, drew the instrument to the edge of the desk, and held the receiver to her ear.

“Yes,” she gasped, with sudden, half-suppressed excitement, “it is I — it is Cynthia!”

Stein was coming around the table.

“Quick — let me speak!” she cried into the transmitter.

Another moment and Stein stood over her. He clapped his hand over the transmitter. And while this was taking place; while Cynthia was looking up at him in frightened protest; while Stein, trembling with rage, was struggling to check the torrent of mad words that were crowding and fighting on his tongue and spilling out in hot phrases that would have astounded her had she realized what he was saying, — had she not been listening, with every nerve alert and keen to something else, — during the very short space of time in which all this was taking place,

the crisp, vigorous tones of John Chance's voice were ringing in her ear and carrying to her bewildered mind a new sense of confidence in herself and in him.

"In just ten minutes," the voice was saying — "at ten-fifteen, by the clock on the table — stand by the door — and be ready —"

The receiver was snatched from her hand; the telephone was thrown into the desk with a clatter and bang, the lid was rolled down over it and locked with a click. But when Stein turned on her, the chair she had occupied was empty. Cynthia was on the other side of the room, looking at him across the table with something midway between scorn and terror in her eyes.

He took one step forward, then paused, and, with fists clenched and breath coming hard, stared at her. Cynthia's eyes shifted from him to the clock and back again. He took another step, but then, still unable to meet the situation, he turned away and fell to walking back and forth across the end of the room, while she, keeping the table between them, moved around near the door. Now and then he glanced up at her, but without speaking. And minute after minute ticked slowly by.

Finally, he came to the table, and resting both hands upon it, looked steadily at her. "Cynthia," he said quietly, "whose voice was that?"

She pressed her lips together, and shook her head.

He slowly nodded. "I see," he said, as if to himself. Then his eyes searched her face. "I want you to come back here, Cynthia, and sit again in this chair."

Again she shook her head.

He smiled, slowly, patiently. "There is really no use in resisting me, Cynthia, because I can, if I wish, put it in such a way that you cannot help obeying me. I am not putting it in that way because I had rather you came voluntarily."

Her eyes dropped to the clock.

"Very well, then, Cynthia; suppose I put it in the other way. I am sorry that it is necessary. I am sorry that you force me to exert the power which has been given me in order that I might be a leader among men." He was intently studying her, watching for the slightest sign of weakening in the face which had a little time before been passive but which was now alert and scornful. He saw her catch her breath, with her

eyes fixed on the clock, and lean back against the wall directly by the door. He walked around to her, glancing himself at the clock as he did so. It was ten-fifteen. He did not know what this sudden tension of her young figure meant, but it evidently meant something.

"Are you standing here by the door because you think somebody is going to open it?" he asked, keeping rigidly to the grave, kindly tone of voice which he had deliberately adopted. "If that is what you are thinking of, you are mistaken, because the door is of steel and there is only one key to it. And that key is in my pocket." He stepped close to her, and looked into her eyes. "Come, Cynthia," he said.

She returned the look, but without a trace of the response he had looked for. He reached out to touch her forehead, and she warded off his hands as if he had meant to strike her, instead of merely touching her temples. His jaws came together, and he snapped his fingers. His eyes roved about the room, uncertainly, until they rested on the drop-light, with the loose wire coiled on the table around it. He suddenly caught her arm and drew her across the room.

"Mr. Stein!" she said breathlessly. "Stop! Don't you touch me!" She struggled and hung back, but with his set purpose and his great strength he seemed hardly aware of her resistance. He put his hands on her shoulders and made her sit down in the chair by the desk. Then, gripping one of her arms, he reached out for the drop-light, lifted it over, and held it just above her eyes and a foot away from them.

"Look up, Cynthia," he said, more quietly. "Look up at the light!"

Her eyes were tightly shut.

"Look up," he said again.

A key turned in the lock. Stein gave an exclamation of utter and bewildered astonishment. And on the instant, without a clear idea in the mind of either of what was taking place, the lamp was back in its place on the table and Cynthia was standing erect, with Stein's grip still tight about her arm. For in the open doorway, holding the knob with one hand and blinking good-humoredly at the light, stood John Chance. His clothes were torn and muddy, and from his hips down he was dripping wet.

Chance had not opened the door without a vivid recognition of the fact that an alternative

to his plan might be forced upon him. What he had to accomplish might be easy, all over in a moment, or it might not. His first, half-blinded glance into the room sheered the easy alternative away; Cynthia was not standing by the door, but quite at the other end of the room, and Stein's grip was on her arm. He had, in a general way, been able to foresee the problem, but the solution of it would depend on minute details which only the spur of the moment could supply him with.

The problem was so simple, that was the difficulty of it. Stein had hold of her and meant to keep her; he was strong enough to do it, and really desperate enough to be dangerous. It would do no good, for example, to hold a pistol to his head, unless one were fully prepared to use it; Stein, in his present mood, would rush a man so armed as certainly as a bull will rush a picador. To make the bluff good, to kill him here in his own castle, would be just plain murder, as undesirable a solution of the problem from Cynthia's point of view as from his own. For other stratagem the plainly furnished, windowless, steel-walled chamber seemed to offer little room. But there was no affectation

in the look with which he faced it; serene, eager, confident, it was the true mirror of his mind. At last, in his goodness, Allah had given him another job.

At sight of him Cynthia spoke, her voice expressing a sort of quiet desperation. "I was at the door and I waited, and then he made me come away."

"I'm sorry I was late," he said. "I was detained a little. But you'll come with me now that I'm here, won't you?"

It was not, after all, strange, the way the mere sight of him braced her and gave her the beginnings of hope. "Anywhere," she answered, "if you can make him let me go."

She spoke of the man whose grip was crushing her arm as impersonally as if he had been a big gorilla. She did not look at him or take her eyes away from the man in the doorway.

Chance stepped inside the room and pulled off his soft felt hat; his smile became a little derisive. "He's going to let you go," he said; "now — within five minutes." Then, suddenly, his tone became graver and he looked at her searchingly. "You're sure you want to go, whatever it costs him? You won't think, when he's

at your mercy, that perhaps he deserves another chance? You won't interfere with the execution when I've passed sentence?"

"No," she said.

Sheer astonishment up to this moment had held Stein just in the attitude in which Chance had surprised him, and, except for his stertorous breathing, silent. But now, with thick voice and clumsy tongue, he spoke.

"You here, you fool!"

Chance sharply threw up his hand. "Hush," he commanded softly. "You don't want your guards to hear — do you, Stein? — and come to take a hand in this? — Come and find you detaining a lady here against her will?" With that he came a step farther into the room, far enough to be clear of the door, and softly shut it behind him.

It had a queer effect, somehow, the soft click of the heavy door. It showed that something, hidden as yet from Stein's slow-moving mind, made this young man, whom his great hands could have crushed to death, honestly believe that he was master of the situation. It had the effect of shifting the focal point of Stein's attention from the girl beside him to the man at the

door. And the tangible result of it was that Cynthia felt the grip on her arm relax, found that she was able, gradually, to free herself and draw back a little, just out of the big man's immediate reach.

She was watching Chance intently, and though his eyes never strayed to her she saw something in them that made her wonder if it had not been to attain this very result that he had closed the door. A high, confident excitement began mounting in her veins. He would save her as certainly as he had saved her that day in Paris. Stein's great strength and the windowless walls of the steel room would no more avail against him than the frenzied mob in the Boulevard.

But she herself must not fail him. Whatever happened, she must not be frightened. She must wait, and she must be ready to play whatever part he might call upon her for. Not the smallest trivial detail of what he did escaped her. When he drew a handkerchief from his breast pocket and wiped his hands with it, she noted that the pocket he returned it to was the outer one in the left side of his coat.

"And it happens," Chance went on after he had closed the door and again stood facing his

big antagonist, "that I don't want the guards here either. They don't know I'm here — Oh, they're all at their posts. I didn't come in through any of the doors nor any of the windows. Perhaps you remember the details of your dream of this temple well enough to know what way I used. But never mind if you don't. The point is that I'm making a personal matter of this. I'm taking your case into my own hands. Nobody, outside the three of us, knows I'm here or here-about. This is strictly our affair — yours and mine."

Stein's head was sunk forward a little and was rolling just perceptibly from side to side. His lips were drawn back in a dog's smile. "So be it," he said. "I want no better."

He had been drawing nearer the slight figure at the door as he said it. He was coming along what, from Chance's point of view, was the right side of the table. And Cynthia, on the other side, was coming toward him, too, probably without being aware of it. She must come no further. Stein was getting ready for a rush, and another step on her part would precipitate it.

Chance plunged his hands into his two side pockets. His eyes, smiling and alert, were on

the prophet but he spoke to the girl. "Cynthia, put on your hat."

It lay on the table toward the farther end, so that she had to go back a step in order to reach it. Stein also fell back a little toward his desk. Chance's move with his hands suggested that he had a revolver in one of his pockets and Stein knew enough of the architect's unusual quickness to feel sure that it would be out and in action before he could get near enough to overpower him. As for the desk, there was a revolver of his own in the upper right hand drawer, if he only could contrive a way to open the desk and get it.

But when Chance took his hands out of his pockets, as he did a moment later, it was only to reveal a cigarette case in one of them and a box of matches in the other. There was an instant of silence. Cynthia was finding the pin-holes in her hat and pushing in the pins. Chance, with that curiously deceptive appearance of deliberation which only very quick men are capable of, was lighting a cigarette and replacing the case in the pocket from which he had taken it; the blazing match in his left hand he tossed carelessly away and it fell upon the rug a yard or more from where Cynthia stood. And Stein,

leaning back against his desk, with one hand behind him, was trying to open the upper right hand drawer.

"You'd better bring your hands around in front of you," said Chance. "I'm going to be the man who holds the gun while we make our arrangements." His hand had flashed out of his pocket again and this time the thing in it was a serviceable looking revolver. He did not hold it out at arms length and sight along the barrel either. The thing lay informally, familiarly in the hollow of his hand and it pointed at Stein's head as if it had been an extra one of Chance's fingers. Before speaking again he raised his left hand and removed the cigarette from between his lips.

"This is an old-fashioned single-action Colt of Bill Hemenway's," he said, "and I can shoot pretty well with it. — Don't move! It's pointed straight, and I give you my word I'm ready to pull the trigger. I had to shoot a dog, once, that some people thought was mad, and I had more compunction about that than I ever shall have about this."

Cynthia had finished putting on her hat and was about to begin drawing on her gloves when, for the first time since Chance had opened the

door, she glanced toward Herman Stein and caught him in the act of withdrawing his eyes from her. He turned slowly toward Chance. "I am unarmed," he said, and his voice was steadier than it had been. "I suppose I must confess that you have beaten me. What are the terms you want me to agree to?"

He drew himself up as he finished speaking with what was a pretty good imitation of his old dignity, and walked very deliberately, three or four steps alongside the table and nearer John Chance.

Cynthia wanted all her strength to keep from crying out. The trick was so patent. The man knew that Chance would not kill him in cold blood. If he could just get near enough under pretence of parley to seize a chance diversion, or perhaps create one — perhaps smash the light and then make his spring —

To see Chance standing there, showing no sign of suspicion of the new danger, his attitude easy rather than alert, his left hand, cigarette and all apparently, even thrust into his side pocket, tested her courage and endurance and her steady resolve to wait and trust the event to him, clear to the edge of her powers.

She heard him beginning to answer Stein's question. "It is Miss Cynthia —"

And at that she did cry out, indeed. Stein had the opportunity he had been playing for. When Chance had begun to speak of her, his eyes for just an instant, had strayed from Stein to herself. And Stein, who with every nerve and muscle tense had been waiting, hoping against hope for this very thing, took his chance, made his spring.

But all in the same flash of time other things happened. In the same instant of her horrified outcry she heard the mate to it from Chance himself. As the prophet had rushed upon him he had sprung toward her. The revolver had flown from his hand, struck the table, slid diagonally across it and fallen near the safe. Chance was stooping at her feet now and clutching the folds of her skirt in his hands.

She bent over. Something was blazing down there and a hot puff of air with the sweetish, pungent smell of burning linen about it, struck her face. Chance was crushing out the blaze with his bare hands.

It was two or three seconds before he spoke. His voice when he did, was dry and not loud,

but it had a compelling, contagious thrill of excitement in it. "Get some water, Stein. Quick! She caught from the match I threw down. Quick, will you!"

For an instant the prophet hesitated. He had caught a glimpse of a blaze, and the sharp smoke was already stinging his nostrils, but —

And then — even this was before Chance had finished speaking — with a queer look in his face he hurried around the far side of the table to the stationary washstand that occupied the corner by the safe.

Cynthia swayed where she stood. Stein would get the revolver! Without the support of Chance's shoulders, as he stooped before her still crushing the folds of her skirt together between his hands, she would have fallen. And she dared not warn him for fear her own words might direct Stein to what, in the excitement of the moment, might otherwise pass unnoticed.

Behind them, where he stood, they could hear the water running — into a basin.

"Tip over the chair behind you and bolt," whispered Chance very softly. "Tip it sideways. "I'll swing the table around as you do it."

She thought she understood. "Not without you," she barely breathed, bending low over him. "He means to kill you. "He's got the —"

Still crouching before her, he threw back his head and looked up, and her amazed eyes saw — nothing tragic, nothing heroic, just a plain, good-humored, reassuring grin with a pucker of what you might have almost called mischief in his eyes. He was holding something in his hand for her to see. The hand was scorched but the thing in it was the charred remains of his own pocket handkerchief and the extinct cigarette. He whispered just the one word, "Quick."

She rested her hand on the chair behind her as if for its support, then overthrew it, as he had said, and darted past him. In the same instant she heard the thud and creak of the heavy table as he swung it around crosswise. She was in the act of turning the door-knob before she heard Stein bellow, "Stop!" Then, as she pulled it open and Chance springing to her side thrust her through, there came, instead of the shattering report of the revolver which she still dreaded, merely one, and then another, and in all five faint, futile, metallic clicks.

"Not loaded," said Chance, quietly.

He still stood in the doorway, his hand on the outer knob. Stein, who had trusted to the revolver, was still penned in behind the impromptu barricade they had made of the furniture. He had thrown down the revolver and now made as if to vault the table in pursuit of them, but the manifest hopelessness of such a course stopped him, and with something like a sob he sank back into his desk chair.

"You didn't understand," said Chance, pleasantly; Cynthia noted in his voice the same cutting edge she had heard in it when he had dismissed Tommy Hollister, and it gave her much the same sensation. "You didn't understand. You weren't sentenced to be shot. There was no question of anything like that. You were sentenced to be made ridiculous, to be remembered as a joke. That's all the reckoning either of us wanted of you. Did you think you deserved to be promoted to real tragedy?" And as he closed the door, he added one word more, in valedictory. "I'm leaving your extra key here in the lock. I shan't want it again." With that he pulled the door to, turned the key, and left it in the lock as he had promised.

"He has a key of his own, you know," Cynthia whispered.

"But he can't get it into the lock until some one comes along and takes this one out," Chance reassured her, and then added, in a voice of rather different quality, "No, you're done with him."

There was a momentary silence between them at that, which he broke with the observation that there were some chairs here in the robing-room and they might as well sit down for a minute. He had got out a match while he was speaking, and now he struck it and held it aloft. But instead of using its brief light to note where the chairs were, they just stood still looking into each other's faces.

In the dark he had imagined her pale, drooping, perhaps about to faint, and what he saw was so different that it drew from him a short laugh of surprise; bright-cheeked, bright-eyed, she had never seemed to him to glow with so warmly human a light before. She had a soft little laugh of her own to echo his, without any reason at all.

"You don't look as if you needed to be helped into a chair, or fanned, or given a drink of water," he said. "That's good pluck after all you've

been through. I saw I could count on you, and I did, and you made the whole thing easy. And now it's over you've a perfect right to turn limp if you want to."

"I wonder," she said thoughtfully, "if any one else in the world could have done it that way — you know what I mean — without making a tragedy of it that would have left a streak of horror across my memory of it."

The tiny flame of the match reached his fingers at last and with some precipitation he flung it down and stepped on it. The action reminded her sharply of something else. "Your hand" — she exclaimed, but without raising her voice — "it's dreadfully burned, I know, and I had forgotten it. You made me forget, but I'll never forget again. I think I can bind it up with —"

With a touch of his fingers he signalled her to be silent, and listening she heard footsteps approaching across the temple floor. "It's just one of the guards," Chance whispered. "It's all right. He won't come here." And as he said, the footsteps gradually receded again.

"But," she questioned, puzzled, "aren't we all right, anyway? Would it have mattered if he had come here?"

"I'd forgotten we weren't in the same case," he said, with a short laugh. "You are safe so far as those guards are concerned. You can go out the front door and you won't be molested."

"But you?"

"Oh, it's nothing serious, only I have to lie low. They're buzzing after me like a swarm of bees, the Beechcrofters, I mean. Stein has said, I believe, that I'm planning to skip with all the cash on the place, or words to that effect. It's not dangerous, only inconvenient."

"And it would be easier for you, wouldn't it, if I went out the front door, and left you free to get out alone?"

He did not answer instantly and she heard him groping for another match. When he had lighted it, he let it shine directly in her face. "You're to choose which way you'd rather go, alone, or with me — Wait a minute. I want your real choice, what *you* would rather do, irrespective of what you think would be easier for me. I may not let you do it after you've chosen, but, for a favor, I want your real choice."

"With you," she said.

He flung away the match, though it was not

yet burned out. "Come, then," he said, a little unsteadily.

"Was that what you meant to make me do, anyway?"

By that time he was ready with another match, and was leading the way to a door which opened on a flight of steps down to the cellar under the platform. And all she got for answer to her question was a boyish sort of laugh.

There was an open manhole in the cellar floor from which issued the rustle of running water. Chance handed Cynthia his box of matches, climbed down the two or three rungs of an iron ladder that hung from the rim of the hole, and dropped off into the water with a splash. His head was a foot or more below the level of the floor. The action drew from her a little cry of surprise.

"It's the big pipe," Chance explained, "that carries the water to make the cascade from the top of the temple steps. We had to make it big to allow for freshets, but it's not more than knee deep now."

Cynthia had been getting her skirts together, preparatory to following him, but now she paused with a short laugh. "Oh, you're not going to

wade," said Chance. "You're going to be carried. You shan't even draggle your skirts."

"I laughed," she said, "because it was the first time I ever thought of Mr. Stein's feathery; miraculous cascade running through a pipe. But I'm not going to be carried and I am going to wade." She began descending the ladder. "I'm not a helpless — frightened — silly —"

She felt Chance's arms tighten around her. "Let yourself go," he said. "I've got you safe. This is another time you're going to mind."

He spent a moment getting her settled in the right position and showing her how to support herself upon him. "You're only half as heavy that way," he explained when it was done and he went splashing off up the conduit with her. He did not talk; as a matter of fact he needed all his breath. For a little way she held herself somewhat rigidly, but presently, and all at once, she relaxed, settled a little nearer him, somehow, with a barely audible sigh of purely physical content. He set his teeth hard at that, and tried to steady his breathing.

"You're getting tired," she said.

"It's only a step farther. Here. There's

a ledge along the side from here on, where you can go dry-shod."

And with that he set her on her feet again.

Presently they emerged from the conduit altogether, and scrambled up the bank of the brook.

"Up to the right here a little way is our old construction road that we used when we built the temple," Chance told her. "Once we find that, we'll be out of Beechcroft in short order."

They did find it almost at once. The night was moonless, but the stars seemed strangely luminous after the black dark of the conduit. They passed the old shack and the barracks of the deserted construction camp, the road narrowed and began to mount more steeply, and all the way they went steadily on, in a silence that neither of them wanted to break. But at last, where the road notched deepest between great ascending walls of pines, and began to dip again, Chance paused and tapped a mile-stone with his foot.

"Here's the end of Beechcroft," he said.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE BEEHCROFT MIRACLE

THE key which Chance had left in the steel-room door turned again softly, but Stein did not move his head until the door had opened and the newcomer stood in the room. He almost knew who it was without looking. Cynthia would not come back. Chance, Hobbema, were gone. But Ellen — it was her turn now.

It occurred to him that she did not look altogether natural, not as she had looked this last twelvemonth, anyway; but he was not interested to analyze the change. He turned back into his former attitude after the merest glance, aware only that if he had been but half the man he had persuaded himself that he was, it might have been Cynthia standing there.

The core of Ellen's soul, in its nest of ashes, was glowing again; not with the destructive

incandescence that once had tortured her, but warmly, comfortingly. She knew now past any doubt that she was no mere gray ghost. She had taken life into her hands again and it had bent, conformably to her will, as white hot iron bends in the blacksmith's. The essential change expressed itself subtly all over her; in her color, her eyes, her gait, even in the way she dressed her hair and wore her clothes. She looked about the room, taking in the significant details of its disorder, all of them proclaiming a struggle and a defeat, and at last gazed thoughtfully at the man himself. She was smiling a little satirically, but with no more intense expression of scorn than that, and when she spoke the tone of her voice was almost friendly.

"So you know the taste of it, at last, yourself. You, too. You put in your best and it was not good enough. '*Mene, mene, tekel* —' There's nothing about that in your bible, Herman, but it comes true, now and again."

At that he looked up at her, still from out the sodden bewilderment into which his defeat had plunged him, but with a redeeming spark, now, of intelligent curiosity in his eyes. "Why do you say that? Why did you come here at all?"

"For more reasons than one," she told him. "Partly to see whether Mr. Chance had been able to keep the promise he made me last night. I knew he would, really. He promised that you should not do to her what you had done to me. But that was not the chief reason why I came. I wanted to see the result of my own work. I wanted to see you looking as you look now and to tell myself that I had brought it about."

"You!" he said, impatiently turning away from her. "You! I can guess how much you had to do with it."

"You shan't guess," she said with a quiet authority that commanded his gaze again. "You shan't guess. You shall know. Listen. Yesterday Samuel Hobbema learned how the Beechcroft miracle was worked, and who it was that worked it. He came to me as he has been coming for a year and more. He thought that between what he knew of you and what I knew, we could utterly ruin you. And he — and I — could reign in your stead. I told him that if he wanted your mantle, he would have to pull it from your shoulders himself. John Chance also knew what he had discovered. He destroyed the evidence and he frightened poor Comrade Samuel

half to death into the bargain. I asked him why he did it and he told me that since he had consented to the fraud his one way of keeping his self-respect was to stay loyal to somebody — that being you — to the end, and to put through the job he was getting paid for. That was yesterday. You were safe yesterday. But it was yesterday that you laid hands on Cynthia; that you made her the same lying promise that you once made me.”

“Before God,” Stein cried, “I would have kept it.”

“Before God,” she echoed, “you meant it when you made it to me. Could you have won me with it, do you think, if you had not? But the end would have been the same with her that it was with me. You are just a great leech with women, and when you had drained her dry you would have left her in the same limbo where you left me. So I told my story to John Chance, and I got his promise that he would take her away from you before it should be too late. That was last night. And to-day, to keep his promise, he has pulled down the temple of your religion as a strong man did once before — a strong man who was not afraid to pay the price. I didn’t

do much. I couldn't have pulled down the pillars, but I led him in and put his hands on them. And that's another story that you left out of your bible."

She broke off there and stood watching him, curiously. He was tugging at a drawer in his desk, trying to get it open. It stuck a little, but the exertion he was making over it was hardly enough to account for the purple suffusion of his face, the shine of sweat on his forehead, the stertorous respiration. Ellen righted the chair that Cynthia had upset, and seated herself in it at the far end of the table.

"So you will understand now why I came," she went on. "I wanted the evidence of my own eyes that I had really effected something again." She inflected the sentence rather vaguely, as if it didn't much matter; the major part of her attention was elsewhere.

He had got the drawer far enough open now so that it moved easily. He satisfied himself that this was so, then rose cumbrously from his chair and walked over to the door. He did not go quite straight, nor very steadily, but this was clearly due to no uncertainty of purpose, but to a mere lack of physical control. With some

fumbling he locked the door and put the key, the second key, in his pocket; then he went back to his desk, seated himself, opened the drawer wide, and took out a revolver. It was the one he had vainly tried to get when he stood facing John Chance. "The other one was not loaded," he said thickly, "but there's no doubt about this."

She had been watching him minutely all the while and with a look that dawned into full comprehension before he took the revolver from the drawer. But there was no horror in her face. One would sooner have called it eager. His own betrayed little beyond a desperate sort of excitement, and he did not look at her, now or the next moment when he spoke.

"It was not he, damn him, who defeated me, nor was it you. I defeated myself. I want you to understand that. It is the last thing you are ever to have a chance to understand. A clever little swindler like him, nor a jealous hag like you, nor you two together, nor twenty like you, could not have defeated me. I could defeat myself, and I did. I did it for her. She was more than all the rest of it. It was worth defeat to get her, and I did get her. She came in here of her own will. She had heard John Chance's

whole story for what it was worth. He played his biggest trump. And after all that, she came here. She was mine, mine, but for a piece of ill luck with that damned telephone, to do as I pleased with, as absolutely as you ever were. The accident that took her away doesn't matter. That was not my defeat. I defeated myself the day I let myself laugh at the pack of lies I had been telling you credulous fools, and said that if they weren't good enough to win her, I had other means that would. They did win her, those other means of mine. I defeated myself to win her. Do you understand?

"Now, listen, for this is the last thing you'll ever hear. I've enjoyed a good deal in this life. I've enjoyed you, among others. I've enjoyed this religion of mine. I enjoyed winning her, enjoyed the knowledge that she was mine. I enjoyed throwing it all away for her. I've made my life as I chose. I defeated myself when I chose. And I choose that this shall be the end of it. I don't care, after these last days, to go back to card tricks, and crystal balls and revival meetings. I'll stop here. I shall sleep sound. I've no fear of dreams, afterwards. And you're going to stop here, too. Not because of anything

you've done to me. You've effected nothing, do you understand? Nothing. But I shall kill you, just as I loved you, and lived with you, and left you, because I choose. Do you want to pray, or anything? You may not think you can sleep as sound as I."

He did not once look at her until he had done speaking. When he did, he found her gaze, eager, intent, curious, fixed on his face. Her lips were still smiling a little satirically and the color had deepened in her cheeks.

"Are you really man enough for that, I wonder!" she said. "I shall never know, I suppose. Oh, yes, I expect to sleep soundly, too. I've an idea that you aren't quite so easy as you say about the dreams afterwards. At any rate, this pose of yours will carry you through with killing me, and, on the whole, I'm not sorry. But to crook your finger with that thing pressed to your own head will be a different matter. You'll be all alone, then; there will be no one to pose before, no one to listen to your impressive last words, no one to care whether you do it or not. It will be the real man, then, who will do it, if it's to be done. And if he isn't what you're trying to pretend he is, you'll turn cold and afraid.

You'll try to steal away, and they'll catch you and hang you, Herman. Oh, you'd best make sure."

There was a moment after that of what would have been silence but for his heavy breathing. She had been speaking, from second to second, from one word to the next, in extreme peril of instant death. He was not holding the revolver; it still lay on the desk where he had laid it, and, indeed, his twitching muscles would almost have precluded the effective use of it. But as he sat there glaring at her out of his opaque, blood-shot eyes, all that held him from flinging himself upon her, choking the words in her throat, killing her with his hands, was the hypnotic power of her utter fearlessness and of the searching truth she spoke. In the silence, however, this peril visibly passed. His big body relaxed a little. She thrust back her chair and stood facing him.

"But if you are sure, Herman; if you really know in the bottom of your soul that you can do it, then you're not defeated at all. At least not yet." Her voice had an infectious thrill of excitement in it. "You can win them back, be their prophet again. A victory would taste good, now; sweeter than ever it tasted before. And a defeat,

if it came to that, couldn't be bitter. It's worth trying — if you're sure."

She broke off with a short laugh, at her own excitement, it seemed, and dropped back into her chair. "A fight like that would be worth while for its own sake, I should think," she went on, rather vaguely. "Not to want anything from them, not caring what they did; just whipping them back to heel, you all alone and they a thousand. And if you did win, the victory would be worth while, too. Oh, yes, even without Cynthia, though you did think an hour ago that she was worth more than all the rest. You'd soon find a successor for her; one whom you wouldn't take so seriously. I wonder why I'm saying these things to you. I suppose I shall always wonder. I suppose it's because you are something besides a fraud. You're a prophet, too, partly. 'Toil and Triumph' isn't all a lie. I believed it, once. So even did you, I think. And for these make-believe people who sit around, coddling their own souls, it's as good a gospel as any. If they turn away from it, it will only be to turn to one of the others —"

Stein was not listening; his own mind was busy with a picture that left little room for any-

thing else. John Chance's analysis of him as simply a fellow-showman was perfectly true as far as it went; but Chance had never perceived how completely Stein participated in the thrill he was producing in his audience. Ellen went to the root of the matter when she called him a poseur. And if this was his weakness, it was also his strength. At least, it accounted for his resiliency. A man plunged half as deep in despair as he pretended he was would have shot himself long before Ellen came to the steel-room door.

She had, indeed, stripped that pose away from him without mercy, but almost in the same breath she had supplied him with another. Her phrases about whipping the disciples back to heel, himself alone against the multitude, had a pictorial quality which set his imagination all ablaze again. He could see the whole picture. He would stand at the head of the stairway to the temple, his formidable figure in full canonicals, lighted by the fitful glare of torches. The multitude would be massed below. He saw himself winning them from angry tumult back to silence; from silence on to cheers, from cheers to the reverent acceptance of his benediction. At that, he rose brusquely from his chair and interrupted her.

"I can win them," he declared. "I have my message again. My feet are plucked up out of the pit — "

His eye fell on the revolver and the sight of it checked him for a moment. He took it up and put it back in the drawer. When he turned to her and went on speaking, it was with all his old, impressive dignity. He had assumed the prophet again.

"It is you who have done this," he said. "It was through you that I was brought down in order that I might again be raised up. I have been through hell. And you, who came and found me in the depths of it, who came to glory over me and who showed me the way out, you cannot tell me why. But I can tell. It is because you belong to me, because we belong together. Is it not so?"

The words did what neither his threats nor his violence had been able to do — made her shrink suddenly away from him and brought a haggard, frightened look into her eyes.

"You tell me you are going to win," she said unsteadily. "If you do — I make no promise. But if you lose, and if you come back here to what you were facing when I found you, then I'll go with you, Herman, gladly."

"I shall not lose," he answered. "And though you make no promises, yet it shall be as I say."

He unlocked the door then, and went out into the robing-room. The next moment she heard him calling for a guard. "Have the bells rung," he commanded. "And do you and your fellows go out among the people and summon them all, every man and woman, to the temple steps. I have a message for them."

The guard made a reverence and withdrew to do the prophet's bidding. Stein, left alone, was about to return to Ellen when his eye fell upon the open door at the head of the stairs into the cellar. Ordinarily that door was locked. He switched on an electric light and looked down the stairway. The next moment he was back at the steel-room door speaking to Ellen.

"I shall be back in a moment," he said. "Wait for me here." He closed the door after him, hesitated a moment whether to lock it or not, and decided in the negative. Then, briskly but softly for so large a man, he crossed the robing-room again and descended the stairs. A line of still damp tracks across the dusty floor led him straight to the uncovered manhole. He

stood here for a moment looking down, then stooped and examined the small iron ladder suspended from the rim of the hole. He had known that the stream which made the cascade from the threshold of the temple door ran under the edifice through a pipe, but that this was large enough to afford a practicable means of egress from his temple had not occurred to him. His face was still grave, impressive, inscrutable, when he moved away.

It was one of the real men inside his skin who had charge of his actions just now, one who may best be described as a sort of man-servant to the other higher-flown gentry who made up his total sum. A very silent, prosaic valet this was, who attended to practical and intimate details and never intruded his humble offices upon the lofty planes of solitude and revery where the prophet walked. He explored the cellar a little further and came upon a heap of litter, the position of which, at the foot of a wooden air shaft, suggested that some careless workman had used it as a chute during the process of cleaning up. Not far away was a sort of lumber-room containing various odds and ends, tools, paint-brushes, and a couple of oily looking barrels.

The bells were already flinging an imperious summons abroad into the night air when he returned to the steel-room. Ellen was sitting just as he had left her. It was the prophet, not the man-servant, who spoke to her. "Listen," he commanded, with uplifted hand. "They are calling the people together to hear my message. I must not fail them. I must be alone for a little. Wait for me in the temple. I shall come soon."

It was entirely characteristic of him that when she had gone, and while the prophet was contemplating his source of inspiration, whatever it was, the man-servant was getting him dressed, in full canonicals, indeed, so far as outward appearances went, but underneath in a serviceable and inconspicuous business suit.

It was long past midnight when Beechcroft heard the bells, but their summons was answered as speedily as if it had been noon. There was no sleep in the valley. Excitement had mounted steadily, ever since Stein's brief excursion from the temple early in the evening. Rumor flew everywhere, diverse, protean, now gross with falsehood, and now again easily to be verified. By now it was everywhere admitted that Chance

had escaped. He had not been seen by any Beechcrofter since he had eluded his watchers in front of Ellen's house, but one of the guards had heard his voice in the temple in evident conversation with Stein. He had mentioned the circumstance to a comrade, and within an hour every person in the colony knew of it. It hurt the prophet more than many a wilder and apparently more damning circumstance could have done.

Taken individually, the Beechcrofters were as harmless souls as one might hope to find in a long day's journey, but in the shadow of this calamity, which enveloped all alike, they were fast losing their individual characteristics. Their collective temper grew steadily uglier and more formidable as the hours wore away in irritating and enforced inaction. Ellen had said that they might be won back by a man who had already plucked the sting from the bitterness of defeat, who was fearless because past fear. She may have been right. But such a victory was not likely to fall to a man who still had his bridges intact behind him, who was dressed, underneath his picturesque canonicals, in an inconspicuous business suit.

So far as preliminaries went, Stein's picture was carried out just as he had conceived it. The Beechcrofters were prevented by a cordon of guards and sheriff's deputies from ascending the steps and they massed solidly at the foot of them. A cluster of gasoline flares which had been used during building operations served to light the spot which Stein had chosen for his stage and the impressive background afforded by the temple doorway.

John Chance's temple had never looked lovelier, more remote from prosaic, material fact, more magical, more the clear substance of a dream, than in the mystery of this June night. Its mere beauty could have won Stein's battle for him alone, had it not been the particular manifestation of his alleged power that was under suspicion. Even as it was, it imposed a solemn silence upon the crowd that waited for the prophet's appearance.

On the surface, then, everything was in his favor. The night was windless, dead still; and his great deep-toned voice — a perfect instrument of which he was completely master — reached and enveloped the uttermost fringes of the crowd. His dignified manner and his

rich, sumptuous diction fitted perfectly with all the rest. For a while the mere impression of it all was strong enough to hold them.

“Draw near and hearken. Through the hours of this night, while you have run to and fro, wondering, doubting, listening to rumors and lies and whispered sayings, I have stood alone. I would have comforted you, but I could not. It was necessary that I await my message. Now, in this hour, my message is given me.

“Listen, ye of little faith, ye who have already denied me unheard, and declared my gospel a lie, ye who have fled from the wall at the first cry of the trumpet, who have turned your hands against your comrades, who would stone me as your forefathers have stoned the prophets from the beginning of the world. Listen, for my message is to you.

“And listen, also, you who have been steadfast, whose faces have been to the stars though your feet have stumbled. My message shall bring you comfort.

“As for you others, who neither believe nor deny, pretenders and the dupes of your own pretence, I know your works. You are neither hot nor cold. So, then, because you are lukewarm and

neither cold nor hot, I will spue ye out of my mouth. Buy gold that ye may be rich, and raiment that the shame of your nakedness may not appear, and depart from among us.

"You to whom I speak, you want the truth, whether it hurts or heals. It will heal at last though it may hurt at first. Open your hearts to it then, and answer. Was it my gospel that has deceived you, or your own denial of it? I have preached a gospel of toil. Have you toiled?"

"Have you?" cried a voice from the crowd.

Really, it was a trap, though if any one had set it, it was the prophet himself? He was betrayed by the very impressiveness of the scene, the very silence in which they had begun listening to him. He had forgotten that he must cow down a multitude; he fancied he was preaching a sermon. And the jeering, high-voiced question from the crowd staggered him like a blow. "Have you? How much toiling did you do on the temple?" He had no answer ready. He could only try to go on with his discourse.

"What is the beauty that I have bidden you attain? Beauty in brick and stone, or beauty in character?"

At that they stopped him in earnest. A murmur, rising in intensity to a roar, and then in pitch to a sort of yelp, swept his words away. Then in the electrical silence that followed, a dozen voices cried out to know what had become of Comrade John.

"Every religion has its Judas Iscariot," Stein shouted. "He has escaped."

A man shouldered his way through the cordon of guards, sprang up two or three of the steps, and shouted before he could be pulled back, "Escaped! With your help, and with our money!"

Another voice came from the heart of the crowd. "He hasn't escaped. They're hiding him in the temple. Find him out!"

By that time Stein had lost them utterly, and he knew it. They would rush him in another minute. The guards might be able to hold them for as long as that but hardly for longer. Half involuntarily he turned for a glance back at the temple doorway.

Deep in the shadow of it he saw a figure clad in dusky yellow; Ellen, who had heard, who was waiting there, no doubt, to offer him the alternative of victory which he had accepted. At the sight of her he turned and again faced the crowd,

but it was too late now. They had seen the backward glance, had understood that it hinted flight. The hint was enough. They swept away the cordon of guards and came surging up the steps.

It was in that moment, in the mere twinkling of an eye, that the true miracle, the one true miracle, was wrought at Beechcroft. Upon the shabby, sham, voluptuous monster, Stein, there descended suddenly, in this extreme instant, the mantle and the possession of true prophecy. In his lying, cowardly, plausible mouth, he tasted the bitterness of truth and knew that he must utter it.

He rushed to the edge of the steps to meet the crowd that was surging up. His face, dark with excitement, looked fairly black in the shadow of the torches, but his eyes shone like lamps.

“Stop where you are!” he bellowed. With all the terrible raucous passion in his voice, there was, mixed up in it, the sound of a gibing laugh. Without a word more, he stood where he was, waiting for them to be still, and while he waited the tumult died away.

“You want the truth, do you? Well, you shall have it now, more than you want. This religion of mine is a lie from the first word to the last.

"Listen, you. There are only two true religions, and they're both old. One of them has got a cross in it, and it tells you that the way to save your life is to give it away, deny it. It isn't my religion, and I don't know much about it. It never was to my taste. But it's a true religion for such as care for its terms. And the other religion, my religion, tells you to get what pleasure you can out of what comes to you, and be content to die and rot when your time comes. And that's a true religion too. A real man can take his choice, and live and die by either. He can be good or he can be bad by either.

"But you, fools, haven't the self-denial for the one nor the courage for the other. You want to be told that you can play it both ways. So either you get up fake religions for yourselves, or else we professional fakirs get them up for you. There'll be new ones as fast as the old ones are exploded so long as there are enough of your sort of milk-sops in the world to make it pay. I didn't begin with this one. I began at the bottom, telling fortunes with a greasy deck of cards and casting horoscopes. And I found out that all people wanted—the sort of people who came to me—was to be told that it was easy. After that I got on.

I took up one fake after another, but I always made them pay. And when I had got to know you inside out I wrote my book, stole it, rather, from another man and softened it up so that it would be easier to swallow. I knew what to tell you. God, didn't I know! I told you that you could be wise without studying, and that you could make beautiful things without learning a trade, and that you could get the fine noble characters by doing whatever you liked. And you made a prophet of me for it!

"That's the truth, and you've got it good, at last. But can you swallow it? Not you. There are plenty more religions as good for you as mine. Go to the one that tells you that there is such a thing as pleasure and no such thing as pain, that believes in good dinners and doesn't believe in the gout. It tells you to dress warm and sleep soft, and it comforts the naked and the homeless by telling them that pain and cold and sorrow are all a mistake. Go over there. That's the place for you. Go where you can pat yourselves on the back and call it Christian Charity. Say 'I am so happy, because you are so happy because I am so happy,' until you bring in the millennium.

"If there is a place for you to go when you are dead, it'll be the Fools' Paradise. You couldn't understand heaven and you couldn't get into hell. You haven't an able-bodied sin among you. Kill me as I stand here; it might make men of some of you. I'm a man. I'm a liar and a swindler and a thief, but I'm a man and you are just lifelike imitations. Your souls are celluloid and your passions are plaster of Paris. You go against my stomach. I've sickened of you. I wash my hands of you."

He turned at that and strode slowly across the broad flagged space at the head of the steps and disappeared in the temple doorway, careless, it seemed, whether they would come pouring up after him and trample him to death or not.

The scene had a curious little anticlimax. There was an indecisive movement in the crowd which might have developed into a rush, but was checked by the sheriff. He was a typical native of those parts, a thin, cautious man, with a high-pitched, nasal, matter-of-fact voice.

"There ain't any one escaped from the temple yet," he said, "and there ain't a-going to. If there's any man or any money in the temple now it's a-going to be there in the morning. And

there ain't any more of you going to get in. Clear the steps."

He was obeyed a bit sheepishly on the part of the leaders, and presently a section of the crowd broke off and went around to watch the other temple door.

The Beechcroft miracle bewildered none of the disciples so much as it bewildered the prophet himself. He walked into the temple like a man drunken, and on encountering Ellen back in the shadow, at first only snarled at her inarticulately. Then, getting some possession of himself, he ordered her, thickly, to be off.

"Go out to the others, where you belong," he commanded. "You've got no business here."

"I made you a promise," she said, and her voice showed how profoundly his words from the temple steps had shaken her. "I made it and I mean to keep it. I'm gladder to keep it than I dreamed I could be when I made it. Don't try to send me away."

The flame of prophecy had died out of him utterly, and it left him spent indeed. He had made four trials of strength since sundown; with Cynthia, with Chance, with Ellen, and with the disciples, and he had met four defeats. All

that was left of him now was a nerveless, badly frightened rascal whose one idea was flight. Ellen was stupidly in the way. He would have struck her senseless there on the temple floor, but he lacked the courage to do it.

"Have you got that revolver with you?" he asked suddenly. "Give it to me."

She obeyed him without demur, and the feeling of it in his hands steadied him a little. "If you will come, come, then," he added. "On your head be it."

With no more words he crossed the temple hurriedly, almost at a run, and led the way across the robing-room and down the stairs into the cellar. Once there, out of danger of immediate pursuit, he stood quite still for a minute or two listening, and, she guessed from his face, forming some sort of plan.

"We ought to have bolted the main door," he said presently. "The other one is locked fast enough." Then without answering her questioning frown he commanded, "Go and bolt it. The bottom bolts will do. That will give us all the time we need."

Rather dubiously and very slowly she turned to do his bidding, for craft of the meanest sort

leered out through the mask of stolidity into which he had composed his face. But, though doubting, she still obeyed, his old power and her own indifference working together.

The moment she disappeared he stripped off his toga and his tunic and slipped the revolver into one of the side pockets of the sack coat he had on underneath. Then, with ever increasing haste, he fetched a barrel of turpentine out of the lumber-room, broached it with an axe, emptied it over the heap of litter at the foot of the air shaft, and set it off. The plan was perfect if only there was time enough. The fire must make headway enough before Ellen's return to lead her at least to half believe that he had perished in it. Whether she escaped or not didn't matter. If she did she would tell the story, which would be well. If she did not, and they ever found her there, it would only lend color to the theory that he had met his death in the same way.

But it was hard to calculate the time just right. He lingered by the blaze, throwing more fuel on it, making doubly sure for just a little too long. He was in the very act of preparing to climb down into the conduit when she came silently upon him.

His attitude told unmistakably what he meant to do.

"Is this the way John Chance took Cynthia?" she asked quietly.

"Damn you!" he shouted. "Why did you come back? But you'll never go out again, to prate of what you saw. I shall be dead to them. It's on your own head now. Do you understand?" The malignity of his face would have made his intent clear without the pointing revolver.

"I understand," she said. "I understand you at last, completely and altogether." And she faced him as still and unflinching as if she had been cut in marble.

But the hand that held the revolver dropped at his side. With the other he wiped his forehead. He cried out with a sort of sob, "I can't do it while you stand there looking at me."

"Kill me as I turn and walk away, then," she said.

But all he did was to curse obscenely, and put the revolver back into his pocket. Then he scrambled down the iron ladder and went splashing away up the conduit.

Through the thickening clouds of dense black smoke Ellen mounted the stairs. By the time

she had half crossed the burning auditorium, those outside had got the doors open, but no one tried to enter, and the guards herded the crowd back to the foot of the temple steps.

There was a great shout when Ellen appeared in the doorway, as if out of the midst of the flames. She descended the long stairway without once looking back and she did not seem aware of the crowd that pressed about her, full of excited questions, when she reached the foot of them. So they made a lane for her and she walked through, and disappeared at last within the doorway of her own cottage.

For another hour, perhaps, the little colony of men and women who, up to yesterday, had fondly believed that by toiling without weariness they were achieving beauty, stood and watched the apotheosis of John Chance's dream miracle, the great cluster of "cathedral candles" burning at last. They watched until, in the early dawn, they saw the cluster of candles guttered, and thanked the heavy smudge that rose about its base for veiling its pathetic nakedness.

## CHAPTER XIV

### O MISTRESS MINE

IN the process of eluding the buzzing Beechcrofters early in the evening, Chance had been so unfortunate as to elude also his lieutenants, Bill Hemenway and Henry Baumann. They had finished packing at the shack before he arrived from Ellen's back door, and had set out in search of him. They went to his house and then to their own, and after that they wandered rather aimlessly among the shifting crowds in the lower valley until the futility of this sort of search occurred, at about the same time, to both of them. Then they hurried back to the shack.

Here they found a clew to him. Henry, climbing from force of habit to the high stool that stood before his drafting table found six loaded revolver cartridges, and the next minute Bill, looking in its accustomed place for it, discovered the absence of the revolver.

The two men looked at each other blankly for a moment, and then Bill beat the drafting board with his clenched fist and broke out in a sort of wail.

"Oh, we're the prize fools of this whole fool place. Don't you see what it means? He's been here looking for us to help him and we weren't here! And now he's gone out to mix it up with that big fat devil, Stein, with nothing but my old empty thirty-eight to pull him through. And we don't know where he is. What are we going to do about it? That's what I want to know. What are we going to do?"

Henry was hardly less perturbed than he, but his Teutonic surface was much more placid. "We are fools, yess," he said. "The wool has gone to our wits. But we will not be fools again. We shall stay here and wait, since we do not know where to go. And, after all," he added, "it cannot be so fery serious or he would not have taken these useful little trifles out of your gun."

"Are you blind?" cried Bill. "Can't you see that that's just what makes it serious? If you're going up against a man you *can shoot* and you've got a gun with the stuff in it, why then it isn't serious for you. It's serious for him. If

there was shells in that gun, I'd let Stein do the worrying. But Mr. Chance must be up against a proposition where he can't shoot. That's why he took the shells out. He knows that if you can't do anything but bluff an empty gun's a damned sight better weapon than a loaded one. That's what he's up against," Bill went on, and now his voice rose to a pitch of frenzied exasperation. "That's what he's up against, and here we sit like a pair of fools, *talking*. Can't you think of nothing better to do than that! Talk — talk — talk! Will our talk hurt Stein any?"

"No, talking iss no good," said Henry simply. "I do not wish to talk. But waiting iss all we can do, and I will wait."

Bill acknowledged the justice of this rebuke with a reluctant grunt of apology and they settled to the task of waiting, Henry sitting quite still upon his high stool, while Bill fumed and sputtered all about the room. They managed to preserve this state of inertia until they heard the clamorous ringing of bells down at the temple, Stein's summons to the disciples to gather to hear his message. Both men hurried to the door at the sound and stood there looking at each other. It was Bill who spoke.

“Well, that means that there’s something going on down there, anyway. And if Mr. Chance is still in Beechcroft at all, it’s where there’s something doing that we’ll find him.”

It was by no means a water-tight sort of argument and Henry shook his head over it, but when Bill added, “Stay here, then, if you like,” and set off at a run down the road, Henry was only a pace or two behind him.

They stayed in the outer fringe of the crowd before the temple and from this point of vantage heard both of Stein’s speeches. Bill, indeed, started forward angrily on hearing the prophet say that Chance had made off with the money, and, a moment later, would have joined in the rush for the temple steps had not Henry, at the imminent risk of a casual black eye, forcibly restrained him.

“What will you do,” the quiet draftsman urged, “with your elbows clamped against your ribs in the middle of that silly mob? If there should be anything to do, could you do it then? This rushing is foolishness, anyway.”

Bill saw the point at once and promptly subsided. As it turned out, there was something to do in a very few minutes. Stein finished his

second speech and strode back into the temple, and the sheriff announced from the steps that both doors were guarded and that no one in the temple would be allowed to escape. Bill whispered in Henry's ear, "The big pipe," and without further words the two men slipped through the fringes of the crowd, scrambled up through the shrubbery above the road, and made their way around to the mouth of the conduit. They had been right in their surmise that no one would be on watch here and they felt pretty confident that Stein had not yet had time to escape. They stationed themselves just within the mouth of the conduit, one on each of the ledges that ran along above the level of the water.

The upshot of this manœuvre was that as Stein came splashing along, his arms were suddenly pinioned fast and he was subjected to a long stare from the single bright eye of an electric pocket torch. His great strength might have made him somewhere near a match for his two captors if he had any fight left in him, but as he stood he was perfectly nerveless and offered no resistance whatever. Even taking his revolver away from him was an unnecessary formality.

Bill examined the weapon and was a good deal

relieved to find, in the first place, that it was not the one Chance had borrowed, and in the second, that it contained its full complement of loaded shells and showed no traces of having been recently discharged. He pocketed the revolver and then ran his hands lightly all over Stein in a cursory search for another bulky package which he expected to find there. Neither he nor Henry doubted that a considerable portion of the cash profits of the Beechcroft enterprise was concealed upon Stein's person. So far not a word had been spoken. Stein was making a queer sobbing sort of noise, but that was all.

"We must take him to the shack," said Henry presently. "Here we can do nothing."

They took an arm apiece accordingly, charged up the steep bank with him and around the turning of the road to the shack. They bundled him into the model room and then, with no superfluous ceremony and no words at all, they stripped him naked and searched every article of clothing upon him. The only valuables they found were his watch and a sum of money amounting to about seventy-five dollars.

It was a serious disappointment to them, for they had been confident that they would be able

to present Stein before the disciples, either in person or otherwise, as they might determine, as the real culprit, caught in the act of making off with the spoils. They cared nothing either about him or about his followers and would not have interfered in the matter at all had it not been the simplest and shortest way of clearing their own chief of the charge Stein had flung at him.

"Well," said Bill, gruffly, "put on your clothes. Oh, yes, you can have your watch and your money, too. We're not pickpockets. We'll let you know in five minutes what we're going to do with you. Come out here into the other room, Henry."

So they turned the key on him and withdrew to confer. The telephone bell rang before they could exchange a word, however, and Henry, being nearest, took up the receiver. His half of the conversation was mostly monosyllables, and Bill nearly perished with impatience waiting to learn what it was all about.

"It's the man who keeps the hotel at the Junction," Henry explained when he had hung up. "Mr. Chance had Claude come up with the Panhard and wait there till he should send for him."

"Well, well, I know that," Bill interrupted.

"Claude talked with Mr. Chance a couple of hours ago and started out with the car in a great hurry. He has just been brought in, unconscious, with a broken head, and the car is five miles out on the State Road, upside down in a ditch."

"And Mr. Chance is — " Bill began with a roar, but at a nod from Henry reduced it suddenly to a whisper—"is waiting *somewhere* for Claude to turn up, and he won't come. And here we are again, about as much help to him as a pair of Beechcrofters."

"We have one job on our hands," said Henry, with another nod toward the model-room door. "We have to make the fat man tell where he has hidden the money that he says Mr. Chance stole. If we can do that job quickly enough we shall save Mr. Chance from being arrested, wherever he is."

While he spoke, Bill suddenly began sniffing the air, then sprang to the doorway, and, without a word of explanation, rushed off down the road toward the temple. Henry cast a reluctant glance at the other door and decided that he had better wait where he was. When Bill came back,

at the end of hardly more than five minutes, his face was all lighted up with confidence.

"We've got that fat prophet now where we want him," he said. "He set the temple afire before he started to make his get-away through the big pipe, and the disciples are thinking by now that he must have gone up in smoke with it."

Without a moment's pause he unlocked the model-room door and went in, Henry following. Stein sat in the farthest corner of the room, an inert, sodden-looking mountain of flesh.

"Listen to me," Bill commanded sharply. "You're going to tell us now where you've hidden the money you said Mr. Chance had run off with."

Stein did not look up. "You know as well as I do," he growled half articulately.

"No; wait a bit," said Bill. "I understand your game. You're dead. After that last speech of yours on the temple steps dead is about all you could be. If you want to stay dead, you'll tell us where you've hidden that money — you'll *show* us where you've hidden it. If you do that and do it quick enough, we'll let you go and you can be as dead as you please. If you don't, we'll take your clothes off and put you into a tunic and

throw you down into the lower valley for the disciples to play with. And that, let me tell you, will be a damned unpleasant sort of resurrection."

"Find Chance if you want to find the money," said Stein, rather more earnestly than he had spoken before. "It's wherever he is."

"Oh, well," said Bill, "if that's what you want, you'll get it. Get it good." And he made as if to suit the action to the word.

"It may be true, what he says," interposed Henry.

"What!" roared Bill, wheeling upon him, all ablaze in an instant.

"Oh, not so much red pepper!" Henry exclaimed. Bill was getting on his nerves. "I shall not begin to think that Mr. Chance is a thief until long after you are convinced of it, and that will be never. But he may have the money without having stolen it. He may well have taken it away from this gross rascal."

Bill grunted assent with obvious disrelish and turned upon Stein again. "As Mr. Baumann says, it may be true. But it's up to you to make us believe that it's true. And if you don't succeed, we'll throw you to the disciples first and go hunting for Mr. Chance afterwards."

Thus prodded on, Stein told his story, truly and circumstantially, though with many intervals of obscene reviling against his captors and Chance and the disciples. He related how he had enticed Cynthia into the steel-room, hypnotized her, and made her conceal the money on her person; how Chance had rescued her and had unconsciously carried off the money with her. He added that she could have no recollection whatever of having hidden it.

"Did he get out of the temple by the pipe, too?" Henry asked, and Stein nodded assent.

Both men were inclined to believe the story true. "We'll just keep you with us, though, until we find him," said Bill. "And we'll go through the formality of tying up your hands before we start out on the road with you. There's a strap in the outer office, Henry, that will just do the trick."

The nerveless way in which Stein had submitted to capture in the conduit had misled them both. There was no symptom now of any change in him. He stood up and waited submissively while Henry searched for the strap, and when he returned with it, meekly held out his hands in front of him.

And then in a flash he seized Bill by the collar and flung him half across the room, butted Henry out of the way, and was gone. When they had got to their feet again and rushed to the door, the night had swallowed him.

"If Mr. Chance ever dies," said Bill, reflectively, "it will be an asylum for the feeble-minded that they'll have to find for us. While he's around to tell us exactly what to do, we get to thinking we're most too smart to live, and he has to leave us to ourselves for about two moves before we give ourselves away."

Henry lent no ear to this discourse; he was studying a map of the valley that hung on the wall. "If they got out of the temple through the conduit, they took the road through the notch. And if Mr. Chance was expecting Claude to come by the State Road, they would go to the nearest point of intersection. And that is Excelsior Siding."

"Oh, well," said Bill, "we may as well miss him there as anywhere else." And so they set out together.

. . . . .

"Here's the end of Beechcroft," John Chance had said, and tapped with his foot the mile-stone

that marked it. After that he and Cynthia went on through the dark wood road in silence. But at last the walls of pine and fir fell away from the flanks of the trail and revealed to them the expanse of the night. The last quarter of a moon hung an hour high above the ridge of Saddle Mountain, lighting the valley slantwise and most mysteriously. The air was languorous, perfumed, sensuous, and yet pervaded with something of the cool innocence of early spring. The valley, spread out beneath their feet, lay drenched in dew, drenched in slumber. They halted involuntarily and stood gazing at it; without the conscious volition of either, they drew close together and stood hand in hand.

It was Chance who broke the contact, abruptly and with a sort of voiceless laugh that made her wince.

"The mockery of it," he explained. "If circumstances ever conspire to laugh, they're doing it now. A night like this, and you here within hand's reach — and I, with what might have been, for consolation. I was tricked, for a minute, into forgetting."

She drew a step or two away from him. After a moment, with a sudden air of purpose, she

crossed the road and seated herself on a fallen log. Chance stood back and watched her; the phrase, "her infinite variety," came unbidden to his mind. She seemed a different creature altogether, both from the girl on the Boulevard in Paris, and from the goddess on the terrace at Beechcroft. About her now, in defiance of the wistful mystery of the night, there was something clean-cut, alert, efficient. It was in the poise of her head with its trim sailor hat and veil, in the forward tilt of her flat back and erect shoulders. She was a person who knew she had something hard to do and felt fully competent to do it. The change had come so suddenly, he felt it almost incredible that it was only a moment since her small gloved palm had lain against his, or that she had ever done his bidding simply because he had commanded her.

"I want you to tell me," she said, "— tell me quite simply and fully, as if I didn't understand at all, about that day of ours on the terrace. I mean after you had come back from talking with the man on the hillside. Why didn't you tell me then what a fraud Mr. Stein's religion was, and the part you had in it?"

"Don't you understand?"

"I want you to tell me," she repeated.

"Why, I suppose —" he began, slowly, "— I think it was because I saw in your face that you would forgive me. I saw that if I told I should be 'peaching' — that's the thieves' word — peaching on Stein for a reward."

"The reward being me?"

"Yes. I hadn't given him away before, though I'd known for a long time how dangerous a thing the fraud was. I'd seen its effects on one person — a woman, too — and I pitied her, but my pity did not lead me to throw up my job. I kept right ahead with it. I didn't think of exposing Stein until I saw it was the way to win you."

"Was Ellen the woman? Was it true — what she told me one day?"

"Yes," he said shortly. She gave a little shudder of disgust, and he went quickly on.

"I saw that the only thing that could give me the right to expose Stein, would be to give you up. I was too much of a coward to do that, even with Ellen's tragedy right before my eyes. I kept hoping that you'd come to see through him yourself and go away. If you did, I thought I could give back my share of the loot and go to work at an honest job, and ask you to forgive me.

I—I shirked paying the price; I suppose that is the way to put it in a word.”

“I being the price,” she commented. “But at last you made up your mind to pay me for the sake of saving me. That’s the way you would put it, I suppose?”

Anger spoke undisguised in her tone now, but “Yes,” was the only word he found to make her an answer with.

“And now that I’ve been paid,” she pursued, relentlessly, “what do you mean to do with me?”

“I telephoned for my motor before I went up to the temple to-night,” he said absently. “I ordered it to come down here to Excelsior Siding. It surely is there by now. It will take you wherever you wish to go.”

“That is to say, you’ve saved me from the results of my folly, as you did before in Paris. And now, once more, you’re sending me off to try again—sending me back to Aunt—” She broke off short and then laughed. “Do you realize that we went off and forgot all about Aunt Augusta? That seems to be getting rather a habit of mine. She must be having a bad night about me, poor dear. —But suppose that Aunt Augusta stays by the new religion, becomes

a disciple of Comrade Samuel Hobbema? He'll be the successor, I suppose. Shall I do that? Or shall I go back to Ohio, where I belong? And 'settle down,' as they say, and marry — Oh, there's a man there. He's the banker's son and he went to Harvard and he doesn't care for business and thinks he's misunderstood. He'd ask me again, I think."

She sprang to her feet and stood facing him. "Didn't you ever — ever once — think of me as anything but a price that could be paid, or a reward that could be had? Didn't it ever occur to you, for only a minute, that I was a human person with life on my hands; a person who could love and hate, and be hurt or be made happy? Didn't you ever get even a glimpse of my side of it?"

And to that he could make no proper answer at all, just a long shudder which shook him from head to heel, compounded partly of cold — he had been wet to the waist for hours — partly of complete exhaustion, partly of an overwhelming bitterness of spirit. She stood looking at him for a moment and it was given her then to see him as he truly was. He looked small, somehow, and utterly tired, dejected, beaten.

She turned suddenly away from him. "Oh, what a savage sort of heathen brute I am! I suppose it's because I'm a woman. If we changed places — if I had been doing for you half of what you have done for me — if I'd risked my reputation and my life for you, if I'd had no thought but of you for days, and no sleep because of you for nights, and after it all you had seen me standing before you, so tired and so discouraged, would you have lashed me without mercy, just because I had hurt your pride a little? And your burned hand — I'd even forgotten that."

She stripped off her gloves and pressed her handkerchief down into the wet grass. "It will feel cool, anyway," she said, taking the hand in hers. The action was almost brusque, as a trained nurse might have done it.

"I'd forgotten the hand, myself," he said dully. "It's not painful."

She bent down over it and brushed the palm ever so gently with her lips. That galvanized him again; he almost snatched it away from her. But as he looked at her even the faint moonlight was enough to show him that there were tears in her eyes. "I didn't mean to hurt you," he said unsteadily.

At that she sobbed outright and for an instant pressed her hands to her eyes. When he could see her again, she was smiling. "It wasn't that that made the tears come," she said. "Let's go on to Excelsior Siding. Is it very far?"

"A mile or two; not more," he assured her. "And I think the car is sure to be there waiting for you."

"Automobiles have been known to break down, haven't they?"

"Well, at the worst, a west bound milk train makes a stop at the siding about five o'clock. It connects with civilization about twenty miles away, over on the D. & M."

"And that's in the general direction of Ohio, isn't it?" she said. But there was a flavor of kindly humor in her voice.

They walked all the way to the siding without another word, and yet, on her part, the silence somehow was of a friendly, unembarrassed sort. Once he stumbled and she caught his arm quickly and strongly enough to save him a fall; when she had steadied him she withdrew her hand so deliberately that its lingering turned almost into a little caress.

At last they reached their journey's end, crossed the meagre little pair of rails which marked the path of the Kinderkill Valley railroad, and brought up rather blankly at the little shed and the loading platform, piled high with the bales which provided a name for the siding. There was no sign of life about the place.

"Well, this is the time it happened," said Chance. "The car is either lost or broken down for it should have been here an hour ago."

"Is this all there is here?" she asked, comprising Excelsior Siding in a small, trivial gesture.

"There's a power-house around the curve, but the engineer —" He lost the thread of the sentence, then rallied his wits and recovered it. "What I mean is, that in the circumstances it's as well, perhaps, that they didn't know you're here. The car will come before long, I hope, and for that matter, the train, too. It's nearly morning. And I can contrive to make you comfortable while you're waiting."

He clambered up on the loading platform and began pulling to pieces a bale of the shavings. With this, a tarpaulin, and a piece of burlap sack-ing, he contrived a sort of nest soft enough for anybody. "You creep in there," he said, "and

leave the rest to me. I'll keep an eye open for the motor, or the train, whichever happens along first. Go to sleep if you can."

She looked at him with smiling eyes. "Get in yourself for a minute and see how comfortable I shall be. I want to take off my shoe and shake a teaspoonful of gravel out of it first."

She stood where she was until he had obeyed her, then seated herself on one of the bales, drew off her shoe, shook the gravel out of it and put it on again. She remained sitting quite still for a minute or two longer. Presently she slipped quietly down from the bale and peered in under the tarpaulin. The trick had worked to a nicety. He was drugged with fatigue and lay, already, a hundred fathoms deep asleep. She drew the piece of sacking over him and covered him thick with armfuls of the shavings. That done, she ensconced herself in a comfortable angle of the bales and looked out over the silvered tips of the pines. The pallor of dawn was already in the sky.

The broad July sun, shining straight down into Chance's face, was what finally roused him. He sat up, rubbed his eyes, pinched himself tentatively once or twice, and began to try to ac-

count for himself. It took him several minutes even to make a beginning at it, but by and by he got his mind focussed on his escape with Cynthia from the temple. From that point of departure he succeeded in reconstructing the night down to their failure to find the car at the siding. He could not pierce the mist beyond that moment, however. There was something familiar about this nest of shavings where he found himself. He must have made it, he supposed, and crawled in without knowing what he was about. But where was Cynthia? A spasm of fear lest Stein might have found her and stolen her away while he was asleep brought him to his feet in a flash. He looked about the platform, then into the shed, without result. Then, when a really rational disquiet was beginning to replace his first bewildered alarm, he caught sight of her.

She was sitting on a grassy bank a little way down the road, and looking, if he had been nearly enough awake to notice it, very piquantly out of keeping with her surroundings. From her neat shoes and provoking ankles up to the wing on her sailor hat, she might have been crossing Twenty-third Street in a hansom cab — except that her gloves lay on the grass beside her, and

that she was very contentedly munching an apple. The color in her cheeks had risen treacherously high by the time he had come quite near, but her smile, to a not too acute observer, was merely friendly and a little mischievous.

"You had no trouble finding me, had you?" she asked.

"I'm having trouble finding myself. I guess you'll have to help me. What's happened?"

"Nothing — much," she told him, and smiled again.

He stood for a moment gazing into her face, spellbound again, just by the wonder of her. She was as wonderful as ever she had been before, and to double the wonder, in a quite new way. She tried to support his gaze with some appearance of nonchalance, tossed away her apple, wiped her hands with a rather crumpled handkerchief, and finally put back a lock of her hair that had strayed a little.

"You'll have to excuse it," she said. "I had to do what I could with a side-comb."

"Your hair!" he whispered, "your wonderful hair!"

He rubbed his hands through his own tumbled locks and the shavings he found there might have

made him suspect that her excuses had been derisive, but his mind was capable of no such subtlety as that. He turned away from her and looked off down the road.

"The motor —" he said; "the motor hasn't come at all?"

"No," she answered.

"And the train —" He pulled out his watch, frowned over it and shook his head. "I must have forgotten to wind it, — but by the height of the sun, I should think the train was late, too."

"You're getting on famously if you can think out a hard thing like that," she mocked, but no mockery could disguise the growing unsteadiness of her voice. There was a pause; then she said:

"I don't think the train was so very late, though."

He pondered that remark a moment before he saw its import. "The train came and —"

"— and went," she corroborated. And I did want some of the milk so much. But I didn't dare come out of my hiding-place to ask for it. These apples are good, though — pretty good. You'd better have one. You must be starved, too."

"You let the train go away — without you?"

Her eyes widened as she looked at him; she seemed to be searching for something in his face. "I wanted to give you another chance to — to send me away. If you send me now, I'll go — I truly will — wherever you say."

He only whispered her name once or twice by way of answer, reached gropingly for her hands, swayed forward a little, and dropped at her knees.

All that she wanted, more almost than she had hoped for, spoke in the act; it was a confession of his need for her, which made her own need for him doubly sweet. She gently released her hands and in the embrace of her arms drew his head up close against her breast. Her lips brushed his temple and her warm tears spilled down on his cheek.

"It wasn't true," she murmured. "I wouldn't have gone, even if you had tried again to send me." And a moment later she essayed a little laugh. "What a lot of trouble I should have saved us if I'd refused to go that other time, in Paris; if I had just stayed where I was and made you marry me then and there. I wanted to."

He moved a little, nestled a little closer. "I am still asleep, I think."

"Sleep sound," she whispered.

But presently, up where the road came crawling over the crown of the hill, she made out, in a vignette of dust, a team of horses and a wagon. "Oh, dear," she said. "I didn't think he'd be back so soon."

As Chance sat up and looked at her inquiringly, she pointed it out to him. "It's our coach and six and our fairy godmother coming to get us," she said.

Then she sighed. "I suppose I'll have to explain it all — no, you mustn't interrupt. And you mustn't expect to understand, because you won't in the least. You had two callers about an hour ago, Mr. Baumann and Mr. Hemenway. They were very anxious to see you, but I told them you were not at home and they could tell me about it and I would tell them what to do. They said they were afraid that you were going to be arrested. Mr. Stein had said that you had gone off with all the money, and they wanted to take it back and say they had found it before any of the sheriff's people could find you and put you in jail. You see it was true, what Mr. Stein said. At least, you had gone off with me and I had gone off with

the money, so it came to that. So I gave the money to Mr. Baumann —”

She paused long enough to glance up at him, and at his look of utter bewilderment, she relented. “Oh, you poor dear, of course you don’t understand, although it’s all quite true. I’ll tell you the whole story, if you want me to. But it’s very long, and all about Mr. Stein, and the coach and six is almost here.”

His puzzled frown relaxed. “No, we’ll let it wait. It doesn’t seem very important or very interesting either, just now. The really interesting thing is the coach and six. How did you happen to think of sending for it?”

She kissed his hand in token of approval. “The car had an accident. Mr. Hemenway says that the chauffeur will get well, though they thought at first he wouldn’t. We’ll have to go somewhere, and I didn’t think we’d want to walk, so I sent the fairy godmother for the coach. But I meant him to be longer finding it.”

The coach proved to be a two-seated buckboard drawn by two lean mountain horses and driven by a much “slicked-up” farmer boy. Bill Hemenway climbed out of the wagon, and simultaneously out of the rôle of fairy godmother,

with a deliberation which had to serve as a cloak for a great deal of embarrassment. He had been wondering all the past hour how it had come about that he had obeyed without question or remonstrance the bright-eyed usurper he had found on Chance's throne of authority, and now that he found himself in the presence of his chief the question reached an acute stage. But the voice reassured him.

"Well, Bill, we made something of a splash, one way and another."

"Yes," said Bill. "Taken altogether, what I'd call a pretty general average. I remember once you told me that this Beechcroft proposition was a show, but I never knew what a holy show it was until last night."

"You won't have to ask any questions about the next one," Chance told him rather soberly; "we're done with hybrids. The next one will be the straight article."

By that time he and Cynthia were seated in the buckboard. "If you see anything of Mr. Stein roaming around these woods," said Bill, "give him my best wishes that I catch a glimpse of him myself."

"We shan't see him, and you won't, either,"

Cynthia assured him. "Mr. Stein took the milk train."

Their driver was slapping his horses' backs with the reins. "Where to?" he asked briskly.

Chance spoke in the manner of one who is gently but decisively taking command of a situation. "Drive," he commanded, "to the nearest place where I can find a marriage license and a minister."

Cynthia chuckled. "You won't forget to give Aunt Augusta my note, will you, Mr. Hemenway? Oh, but let Mr. Chance read it first."

"Don't worry about me," was the substance of it. "I am off getting married to Mr. Chance."

He leaned back in his seat with an outright laugh. "I'm still an hour behind the schedule. When are you going to let me catch up? Are you going to get the license and the minister?"

"I don't see how you can," she told him. "You don't know yet who it is you're going to marry." Then she began counting on her fingers. "You have run off with somebody's money, and you don't know how you took it; and you're going somewhere to get married, and you don't know where; and you only know the first name of the girl you're getting married

to. Am I even with you for Paris, Monsieur Jean?"

They waved good-by to Bill who stood hurrahing in the road. Then Chance had an idea.

"Driver," he said, "where can we get breakfast?"

"Our house is just a piece up the road. I guess mother'd make you some."

"And will she let us begin with pie and pancakes?"

The boy giggled. "That's the way I like to begin myself."

Trudging back to Beechcroft along the old construction road, Bill indulged in soliloquy. "He never told me where to ship our stuff, nor where to go myself, nor what we was to tackle next, nor whether it was to be to-morrow or next year. He didn't even give me a telegraph address. And the funny thing is, I clean forgot to ask him."

Indeed, it looked, now this new goddess had climbed into the car, as if the levers would be pulled more capriciously than ever. But for all that, Bill wore a grin.

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